

Grosse Pointe News^{online}

2005-05-26 ► News ►

Shores dredging could cost millions

Brad Lindberg

write the author

05/26/2005 - Mother Nature is a generous hostess, but what do you do with a gift of 160,000 cubic yards of unwanted soil?

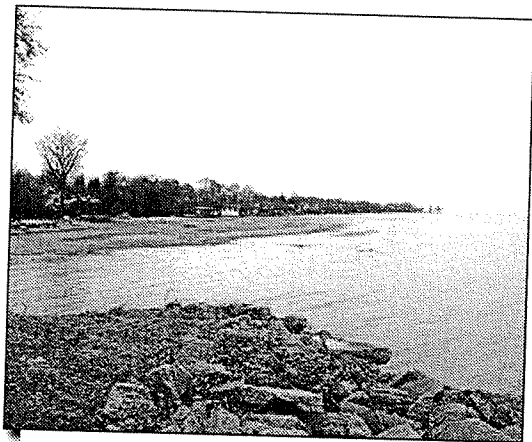
That's not enough to fill the Superdome (4.6 million cubic yards), nor enough to replace material excavated to build Ford Field (300,000 cubic yards), but 'tis enough, 'twill serve.



Petitioners have requested state permission to remove 160,000 cubic yards of soil located along the Lake St. Clair shoreline north of Vernier in Grosse Pointe Shores. In these images from 1998, the buildup of sand and other material has put a boathouse high and dry.

Some homeowners with property abutting Lake St. Clair north of Vernier have requested permission to remove sand and muck that has accumulated along the breakwall.

The area in Grosse Pointe Shores is mostly hidden from public view by houses on Lakeshore. But it looks similar, albeit much larger, to soil accumulating upstream of Pier Park at the foot of Moros in Grosse Pointe Farms.



File photos by Brad Lindberg

"Five members of the community propose to dredge 160,000 cubic

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yards of material from the lake between the (municipal) park up to just short of 1000 Lakeshore," said Mark McInerney, Shores village attorney.

"The applicant proposes to (return) the lake bed north of the harbor to pre-1960 conditions and to restore riparian access to the lake for impacted property parcels," according to a notice from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. "The proposed dredging will impact approximately 80 acres of lake bed and/or wetlands."

Excavation amounts to depths up to five feet along 4,065 feet of shoreline with lesser quantities extending more than 1,000 feet into the lake, as illustrated in documents filed in support of the dredging request.

The matter concerns accretion, sometimes described as nature's gift to a landowner.

Scientists define accretion as "the gradual and imperceptible accumulation of land by natural causes, as out of the sea or a river."

The homeowners don't like it and want it taken away.

"Dredging will be completed with a shallow draft cutter suction dredge," according to the DEQ's notice. "If this machine is unable to operate near the shore, equipment such as a bulldozer or front-end loader will be used to move sediment."

"The sand will be de-watered in a temporary staging area then removed from the site by barge," according to the application dated Feb. 11.

"De-watered sand will be loaded onto barges," the DEQ notice reads. "Dredged spoils will be taken to a suitable dock for upland disposal. Final disposal location(s) for dredged spoils have not yet been determined."

"The estimate by the petitioners is that it will cost \$7 million to do this," McInerney said.

Petitioners want the shoreline restored to a time when water, not soil, scrub grass and decaying vegetation braced the outside breakwall and lapped beneath boathouses overlooking the shallows.

Because dredging alters lake bottom, which is owned by the state, the DEQ and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have to weigh-in on environmental issues.

Last month the DEQ issued a public notice about the petition, inviting public comment.

"That notice was sent to property owners both on the lake side of Lakeshore and the west side of Lakeshore," McInerney said. "On May 9, the village insurance company counsel responded on behalf of the village, expressed concerns and requested a public hearing. We understand that several other individuals have requested the hearing. Our expectation is that with all these requests for a hearing, there will be one."

DEQ officials anticipate scheduling a public meeting on the request in June. The date hasn't been set. Government officials will base their ruling on the public interest.

"Those agencies are not generally in favor of digging stuff out of the Great Lakes," McInerney said. "If the Corps and DEQ were to decide that dredging is all right and is not going to disrupt too many habitats, then there's a cross-question."

Whose going to pay for it?

Some people say the buildup of soil in the Shores is a natural occurrence due mainly to lower lake levels.

Others say it's due to the interruption of shoreline wave patterns and currents caused by manmade peninsulas on which stand the Shores municipal park and Grosse Pointe Yacht Club.

"We haven't been told exactly who's going to pay for it," McInerney said. "I have a suspicion who they (the petitioners) think should pay for it — the village and Grosse Pointe Yacht Club. The biggest concern expressed by the village is that even the petitioners acknowledge everyone who lives along the lake is not in agreement with this proposal."

"A total of 33 properties with 31 owners are located adjacent to the proposed dredge area," according to the DEQ notice.

"That's a concern — that it's not even close to unanimous approval," McInerney said.

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.



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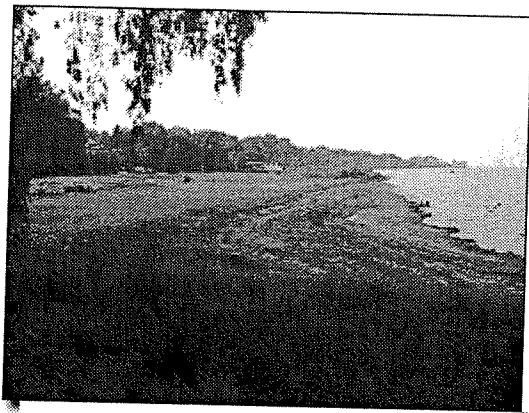
Dredging proposed in Shores

Brad Lindberg

write the author

06/23/2005 - There are a few days left for the public to weigh in on whether tons of sand should be dredged from the western Lake St. Clair shoreline north of Vernier.

The window for public comment closes Friday, June 24.



The landlocked condition of Rankin Peck's boathouse, which he now calls a beach house, is often cited as a consequence of accretion on the lake St. Clair shoreline north of Vernier in Grosse Pointe Shores.

A group of Grosse Pointe Shores lakeside home owners have requested state permission to remove 160,000 cubic yards of sand that has displaced the shoreline and in some cases spilled over breakwalls into back yards.

Five of 31 land owners abutting the burgeoning beachhead advocate the estimated \$7 million reclamation project.

Seventeen of the property owners support dredging, although Shores officials said those residents don't want to pay for it. The remaining 14 property owners have not been heard from.

Because the area of sand, called accretion, is officially lake bottom and thereby owned by the state, government officials beyond the municipal level have the final word.

Petitioners say the 80-acre build-up stems from the interruption of coastal currents by man-made obstacles downstream, namely landfill to create the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club and modifications to Osius municipal park.

As configured, such structures interfere with currents that once carried fine sand and silt downstream, petitioners say.

State environmental regulators welcome opinions on the matter from anyone with a relevant perspective.

It's important for both advocates and opponents of dredging that all lakeside, or riparian, land owners along the contested section of shoreline register their opinion.

Otherwise, Lansing officials acting on a combination of their own

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research and public comment already received will decide for them.

"We would not issue a permit that would affect someone's riparian land without that riparian's approval," said Andrew Hartz, environmental quality analyst with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

"That's safe to say," said Tom Graff, environmental quality specialist with the DEQ land and water management division in Lansing.

"I can tell you, though, I don't think I have received 14 objection letters," Hartz said, referring to the silent residents. "Anyone's silence on it is implied approval of the project. We want to see something in writing from each of those owners."

Hartz and Graff will rule on the petition at an unspecified time. An explicit yes or no from residents would help their decision making.

A public hearing is being scheduled by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Hartz said opinions can be filed with him by e-mail or fax:

- e-mail: hartza@michigan.gov or
- fax: 586/751-4690.

Include application file number: 03-82-0067-P in the subject line of the e-mail or fax.

"We're looking at the adverse impacts this project might have on the ecology of Lake St. Clair," Hartz said. "We look at how the project might affect not just people who live in this immediate project area, but residents upstream and downstream."

"We are responsible for reviewing impacts to the public's right of use of the waters, effects on adjacent landowners' riparian interests and impacts on the environment," Graff said. "Any project will have some adverse impacts, but we're trying to minimize those when we look at a permit application."

State review includes examining existing conditions and reviewing options beyond what has been petitioned.

"We would look at potential alternatives that could be used to realize the goal of the project that might have less impact on the ecology of the lake," Hartz said.

A public hearing last Tuesday evening at Parcels Middle School auditorium drew about 150 people.

"This public hearing is an attempt for us to learn from people who live there, use the area, live near the area or could be directly affected by the project," Hartz said.

Petitioners based their request to dredge on seven years study costing nearly \$300,000, according to John Booth, one of the petitioners.

"We would all prefer the problem to go away. It will not," Booth said in a written statement read by a representative. "So long as the man-made conditions which created the opportunity for this rapid build-up of sediment exist, accretion will not only continue, but will increase geometrically year-by-year as documents and records show in our studies."

A representative of Lakeshore resident and non-petitioner Manuel Maroun criticized the petition in several respects:

"It fails to achieve a consensus of affected property owners. It fails

to identify the party responsible for accomplishing the action requested. It fails to consider a less invasive, mutually effective option. It fails to identify the party responsible for funding the action requested. It's an ineffective measure to accomplish a permanent solution."

Petitioner Kay Felt said the incursion of sediment behind her house has made the site an "unattractive and ugly place."

She said the problem has consequences on property values beyond her back yard.

"What happens along Lakeshore will ultimately affect the entire village, Felt said.

The symbol of accretion north of Vernier has become a landlocked boathouse once propped over water deep enough to handle a motor boat.

"I'm the guy with the boathouse," said Rankin Peck, petitioner. "It used to be a boathouse. Now it's a beach house. About six years ago I kept a 24-foot aluminum cruiser. Sand started coming in. I couldn't keep the sand from coming in."

Now the shoreline he enjoyed has become a messy collection of washed-up debris and decaying vegetation causing an awful stench.

"We're afraid of West Nile disease," Peck said. "It's terrible, the smell and everything. We should do whatever we have to do to get rid of that sand."

Who is going to pay for removal?

Ross said if the Shores were to support dredging as benefiting the entire village, funding would become available from higher government sources.

"We have had discussions with state and federal representatives who have indicated there are funds available for a project like the one we are proposing," said Joanne Ross, an attorney from Grosse Pointe Park representing the petitioners. "The ability to access those funds increases if you have a municipal or governmental partner applying with you to use those funds."

Shores President Dr. James Cooper opposes municipal participation under current conditions.

"At least 14 residents (in the dredging area) have not approved the proposed dredging," Cooper said. "We are very concerned about imposing dredging on those who have not approved it and, in some cases, strongly object to it."

Cooper cited the interests of all Shores residents.

"We want to ensure that those interests are not compromised by this project," he said.

"I live on the lake," said Diana Levick. She said she cleans debris off the beach herself.

"I did not ask anyone to do it for me," she said. "Why are we asked to pay for it?"

"Accretion is not going to stop," said Peter Zuzak, a geologist and associate with Baird Assoc., retained by the petitioners to study the problem and remedy.

Zuzak said if enough accretion were dredged to restore the shoreline to pre-1960 conditions when accretion really began to take hold due to fills at Osius Park, the cycle would repeat.

"As soon as you're done dredging, Mother Nature's going to kick in

(and) start moving sand along the shoreline again," Zuzak said. "Slowly this area will start to fill up again. Our best estimate, and this is something very difficult to quantify, is that in about 30 years the area will be filled again."

Petitioners said dredging now would be better and less expensive in the long run than delaying action.

"If you don't take the sand out, it's going to build out into the lake and get higher," Zuzak said.

"When we first surveyed this property in 1999, the survey indicated we had 100,000 cubic yards of sediment. By the fall of 2004, that figure increased to 160,000 cubic yards," Ross said.

The study is about two inches thick. It summarizes seven years study by Baird Assoc. of wave and current analysis, sediment transport, elevation surveys and soil samples.

Zuzak said more than 37 soils tests show proposed dredging material consists of fine sand, not organic wetland material, and is free of PCBs.

"All sediment came back clean," Zuzak said.

The \$7 million dredging cost is a high-end estimate that could be lowered once approval is obtained and plans are refined, according to Ross.

"We're looking at fine-tuning construction methodology to make it less expensive, more efficient and less time consuming," Ross said.

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.

Introductory Remarks By James M. Cooper, President, Village of Grosse Pointe Shores, At DEQ Public Hearing, June 14, 2005

The Village of Grosse Pointe Shores has concerns about the proposed dredging project on several different levels.

First, we wish to protect the interests of the 31 of its citizens who own riparian property that would be directly affected by the proposed dredging.

- some 17 of those residents have approved the proposed dredging at some point (although some of those approvals were contingent on the owners not having financial obligations due to the dredging, an issue which is an open question).
- the Village appreciates the concerns of those property owners who have approved the dredging; there are certainly conditions along the lake that are not what they, or we, would prefer.
- at the same time, at least 14 of those residents have not approved the proposed dredging — and we are very concerned about the idea of imposing this dredging on those who have not approved it and, in some cases, strongly object to it.

Second, we recognize the interests of all residents of the Village — not just those 31 riparian owners — who use Lake St. Clair for boating, swimming, fishing, or other activities — we want to ensure that those interests are not compromised by this project.

Finally, we feel an obligation that goes beyond the Village limits to all citizens of the state — to make sure that any project does not adversely affect the conditions of the Lake St. Clair bottomlands, the fish, bird and other wildlife habitats along the lake, and the wetlands that might be impacted by this project.

As a result of these three levels of concern, the Village has asked its attorneys and consultants to address this hearing to express

the specifics of our concerns in greater detail. Speaking this evening will be one of our attorneys, Mr. Timothy Ferrand, and one of our consultants, Mr. Mike Nurse, who will address various legal and environmental issues, respectively.

On behalf of the Village, I thank the DEQ for its consideration of all of the public input it has received and will receive in connection with this project. I am confident that the DEQ's final decision will be in the best interest of the residents of Grosse Pointe Shores and the citizens of the state of Michigan.

Memorandum to Mayor Cooper, the Village Council, and All Whom It May Concern:

The story of the build up of accreted sediment along the shoreline of Grosse Pointe Shores north of the Village harbor is a tale of compounded, unintended consequences.

This is not my opinion, but proven, scientific fact. The facts are supported by years of shoreline study, photographs of the shoreline dating from the building of the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club in 1928 to present; and a set of scientific studies conducted by a small group of concerned shoreline property owners who have spent nearly \$300,000 of their own money to make a gift of the information from this expert research to the Village; no doubt the single largest valued gift to the Village in recent memory.

What the study shows is that in the early 1960s, in order to deal with accretion build up in the Village harbor, the Village Council decided to fill in the open wharf which formed the northern boundary of the harbor; thereafter, this accretion was displaced to the north. Next, in an effort to expand the park, landfill from the construction of I-94 was added to the lake bottom to fill-in between the harbor and the Hawthorne peninsula. This fill, in turn, displaced the area for accretion again to a new point beyond the Hawthorne point. Next, the Village decided to alter the northern wall of the park and harbor to form a uniform curved retaining wall. This decision had the unintended consequence of creating conditions for wave reactions and back-splash, especially with a strong northeast wind, causing a rapid build-up of accretion from the now combined effects of blocked shoreline drift and back-splash. This combination of factors led directly to the rapid build-up of soon exposed accretion north of Hawthorne point. The Village would prefer to not deal with this problem because the solution, dredging, is expensive. We all would prefer to have the problem go away. It will not.

So long as the man-made conditions which created the opportunity for this rapid build up of sediment on top of state bottomlands exist, accretion will not only continue, but will increase geometrically year by year as documents and records show in our studies. The cause is not nature. Once these series of unintended consequences were set into motion, only action by the community, not dependence on nature, will stop the creation of a giant sandy moor superimposed between the private shoreline and the lake.

The Village and its representatives argue that the accretion should be classified as "wetland." This would, again, create another unintended consequence. Should the accretion be successfully labeled as wetland, it would become very difficult to remove due to both state regulations and public environmental pressure. It would fall under the jurisdiction of the state and be placed beyond the control of either the Village or the property owners, and it would be freely available to nonresidents for public access. This would, of course, have a significant negative impact on the value of the properties along the shoreline, and ultimately the taxable value for the Village.

But, most important, the shoreline property owners would lose all of their incidence of private control to groom and manage the dry accreted land, with the possibility of large fees imposed by the state should they attempt any maintenance without a permit.

The Village is rightly concerned about the cost and disruption to the community that a large-scale dredging operation would produce and rightly concerned about property owners who express either reservations or opposition to the dredging. However, the unintended consequence of successfully blocking an application to dredge is that these conditions will grow much, much worse and become much more expensive to correct later.

Perhaps the greatest irony and unintended consequence is the final chapter in this tale. While it began with efforts to improve the Village harbor and park, the final chapter will be the merging of the two large new, developing sandbars, one approximately 1,000 feet east of the Hawthorne point, and the other off of the northeast corner of the Yacht Club's outer wall. When joined, accretion will be trapped in the area of open water directly in front of the Village park. Ultimately, the park will become landlocked with acres of smelly, debris-strewn, unkempt, overgrown, sandy moorland, controlled by the state, and separating the park from the waters of Lake St. Clair.

Given all the money, time and effort expended to improve our beautiful park, what a sad and wasteful end to the tale indeed.

If the application for dredging is denied in the wisdom of the DEQ, and supported by the opposition of the Village Council, please, Mr. Mayor, hold onto our expensive study which you received. Use it. Update this study and plan as time goes on. You or your successor will need to refer to it at some point in the future.

John L. Booth, II

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2005-08-25 ► News ►

Farms resident, solons tired of accretion

DEQ: Don't touch!

Brad Lindberg

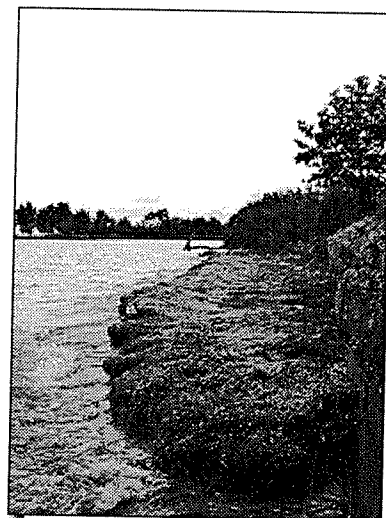
write the author

08/25/2005 - Paul Koch thought he bought a house overlooking Lake St. Clair, not Lake Okeechobee.

But as sand and vegetation clog more and more of his view along Lakeshore upstream of Pier Park in Grosse Pointe Farms, he's not so sure.

"Something has to be done to remove this," Koch told the city council this week. "If we do nothing we're going to have an Everglades situation."

Koch was singing to the choir.



Years of accretion have built up enough land upstream of Pier Park to create a foothold for dense foliage.



Photos by Brad Lindberg

Councilmembers Peter Waldmeir Jr. and Joseph Leonard shared first-hand frustrations over the build-up of accretion against the eastern breakwall of Pier Park. The park is a man-made peninsula created decades ago by landfill.

Waldmeir used to own a house overlooking the area.

"When I moved into that house (in 1993), there was no beach," he said. "Then the lake receded. The MDEQ (Michigan Department of Environmental Quality) said we can't touch it."

During the 1990s when Leonard headed the Farms public service department, he assigned workers to tackle the problem.

"We did maintain growth on that beach," Leonard said.

He stopped work upon receipt of a letter from the MDEQ. He said the letter ordered the city to cease and desist or face a \$10,000 fine per day.

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"We were disturbing fish and wildlife," Leonard said.

"If you're talking about changing foliage or bottom land, you're going to get fined if you don't have a permit," said William Burgess, city attorney. "Governing legislation is the Great Lakes Submerged Land Act. You're talking about the discretionary responsibility of the MDEQ."

"If it is a law, the law can be changed," Koch said. "If it is a regulation, that regulation can be changed."

Farms officials will ask their former mayor Rep. Edward Gaffney, R-Grosse Pointe Farms, to help maneuver their concern through state agencies.

"I'm for protecting the lake, but this is unsightly," Gaffney said of the build-up. "We passed a bill a couple years ago that allowed private residents to trim up to half of their frontage."

The bill allowed mechanical mowing and leveling of sand, removing vegetation and plowing the top four inches of soil between the ordinary high water mark and water's edge.

"That entire area is below the ordinary high water mark of Lake St. Clair," said Andrew Hartz, environmental quality analyst with the MDEQ Land and Water Management Division. "Such alterations to this area require prior approval from the MDEQ as well as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers."

The rights of riparian property owners are important. In this case, that means home owners on Lakeshore fronting accretion.

"(The owner) likely has the most say in what occurs down there," Hartz said. "If (he or she) doesn't own it, the state does. This is not city property, nor is it county property. Neither agency has no business being down there."

If environmental laws prohibit removing the dense brush along Lakeshore, Gaffney said he may approach the issue from a public health or safety standpoint.

"I'd be happy to investigate it," he said.

Hartz is looking into a similar matter in Grosse Pointe Shores. A group of residents want permission to dredge acres of accretion upstream of Osius Park and the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club, both set on landfill.

Hartz said the state awards permits based in part on a project's effect on:

- the ecology of Lake St. Clair, including fish and wildlife,
- water quality and
- lakeside property owners.

Regulators will consider less invasive alternatives to removing accreted sand and related vegetation.

"Like the accretion dredge project near the GPYC, we want to know why 'they' want to alter the area, how (and what) alternatives (are being) considered," Hartz said. "We would not allow dredging of the Farms accretion area to 'make it look better.'"

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.



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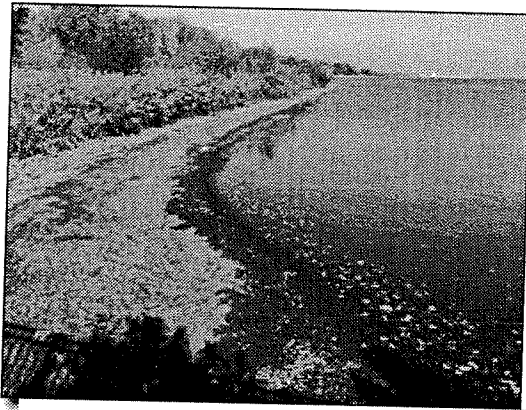
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Nature creating new shoreline along Lake St. Clair

Brad Lindberg

write the author

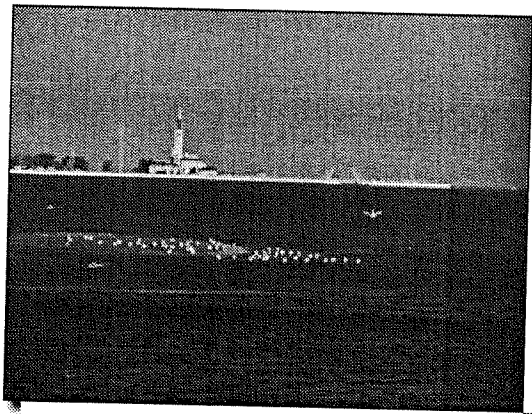
11/10/2005 - The ebb and flow of lakeside living brings both good and bad.



Accretion above Pier Park in Grosse Pointe Farms is accompanied by the buildup of sandbars offshore. The same situation exists to a greater degree behind houses north of Osius Park in Grosse Pointe Shores.

Breaking waves can wash a shoreline clean — or leave behind nature's washed-up refuse.

A sandy beach can evolve into a wetland that harbors waterfowl and helps keep the lake clean by filtering runoff — or descend into a stagnant muck of decaying vegetation.



Photos by Brad Lindberg

Lake St. Clair is nothing if not dynamic.

"Since it is an ever changing body of water, sometimes things occur that not everyone is pleased with," said Andrew Hartz, analyst with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality water quality division and Grosse Pointe native.

Hartz called Lake St. Clair dear to his heart, a place he grew up

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fishing on and hunting near.

Lakeside living also provides Pointe residents a lifestyle benefit unmatched by landlocked suburbs boasting equally excellent school systems, city services and public safety.

"Lake St. Clair provides millions of people recreation opportunities, jobs and much needed open space in our metropolitan area," Hartz said.

For all the development along the lake's United States border, a survey shows Michigan retains more wetlands than along the shoreline of more rural Ontario, Canada.

"Most of those (Michigan) wetlands are in St. Clair County near the St. John's Marsh," said Mark Richardson, assistant Macomb County prosecutor for water quality. "In Grosse Pointe Shores, six acres of potential wetlands have been identified."

Hartz and Richardson were among speakers last week during a coastal land use forum organized by Clean Water Action at the Grosse Pointe War Memorial.

Richardson's comments about accretion in Grosse Pointe Shores referred to vegetation grounded on accretion piling up behind houses north of Vernier. A smaller but comparable example exists north of Pier Park at the foot of Moross in Grosse Pointe Farms.

Sandbars are building offshore of both locations, both upstream of seawalls and landfills projecting into the lake.

"Shallow water areas like this are being colonized by vegetation all up and down the Lake St. Clair shoreline," Hartz said. "No doubt the seawall at the Farms park has allowed some sand and soil to fall out of the water column creating shoaling. The highest of some of these areas is supporting emerging vegetation."

Different people have different opinions of these cases of encroaching nature.

Rep. Edward Gaffney, R-Grosse Pointe Farms, and former Farms mayor, has heard both sides.

"It's unsightly," Gaffney said. "The growth is equivalent to weeds. But some people like it."

Property rights are guaranteed a role in determining how accretion will be handled.

"Private property ownership must be considered, as well as state laws that regulate altering the bottom lands of the Great Lakes and connection channels, of which Lake St. Clair is one," Hartz said.

Part of Richardson's job in Macomb County is protecting wetlands.

"Unless local communities act, virtually none of the 4,000 acres (of wetlands in Macomb County) will probably ultimately be protected," he said.

He said Michigan wetland law is limited in scope.

"For one thing, it only regulates wetlands that are at least five acres or greater in area," Richardson said. "I venture to guess the vast majority of the 4,000 acres is in (sections) less than five acres. The state law does allow local communities to enact local ordinances to protect wetland areas that are less than five acres, down to two acres and in some circumstances less than two acres."

Richardson's office produced a set of sample environmental ordinances for other communities to emulate.

If areas of accretion along the Pointes are declared wetlands,

they will be protected by state law.

The question of municipal control over the situation may be moot in the Farms.

"The area next to the Farms park lies entirely below the ordinary high water mark of the lake," Hartz said.

That means the area is located on state land, not within city jurisdiction.

"However, the city feels it does have an interest in the property because it impacts our community — aesthetics and public safety issues associated with it," said Shane Reeside, Farms city manager.

Farms officials want to work with the Department of Environmental Quality and affected property owners to do something about vegetation going wild in the accretion zone.

"We're in the process of consensus building," said Matthew Tepper, Farms assistant city manager. "The DEQ has an opinion. Environmentalists have an opinion. Some residents have another opinion. The city has an opinion. We're trying to talk to the various parties and come up with a solution."

Environmental engineers are being recruited to examine the site, evaluate plant life including invasive species and devise whatever grooming could be done to reign in plant growth.

"The idea is to come up with almost a landscape plan for the accretion that would be environmentally beneficial, but would also be aesthetically acceptable," Reeside said. "We could potentially remove higher-growing vegetation and have lower-growing coverage that wouldn't obstruct the view of the lake but will provide a natural purpose."

Unlike in Grosse Pointe Shores, where a group of residents are preparing to resubmit an application to state regulators for dredging accretion, Farms officials said dredging isn't a consideration.

"It would be cost prohibitive," Reeside said. "The better approach is to make that feature work in harmony with the city in terms of environmental and aesthetic value."

"Some people won't be happy unless it looks like a golf course," Gaffney said. "Others want it to go wild. I think there's something in between that will look good but doesn't have to be manicured."

Accretion is popping up partly due to lake levels going down.

Lake St. Clair is nine inches below its long term average, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Levels are 46 inches lower than in 1986 and are expected to decline another three inches by December.

"We had century high waters in 1986," Hartz said. "In 1997 we saw levels just inches below that century high. After that the water began to drop to levels we're seeing today. In the mid-1990s, we had an explosive plant growth problem and subsequent issues with dead vegetation, beach closures and E.coli issues."

Accretion and emerging sandbars should be viewed from the perspective of normal lake levels, not high water of a decade ago.

"The normal lake level was not 1986 (or) 1997," Hartz said. "The normal lake level is more like we're seeing today. That being said, shallowest areas of the lake are sure to undergo some change. Most notably along the Grosse Pointe shoreline the (Farms) park and north of the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club."

Citizens in both communities have asked elected officials to remedy what is perceived as unsightly or unhealthy conditions

associated with accretion and vegetation that is becoming common to the area.

"Through public education, and careful examination of existing conditions along with establishing goals regarding what (could) be done to these areas," Hartz said, "we ought to appreciate the changing landscape of the shoreline and come up with a solution that everybody can live with."

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.



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Ever ready accretion keeps on growing

Brad Lindberg

write the author

11/17/2005 - Chalky whitecaps break without sound over sandbars far offshore behind Kay Felt's lakeside home.

It's warm for mid-November, warm enough for Felt to remove her shoes, sit in the sun on her backyard patio and take in the view.

Her 14-year-old golden retriever, Nicky, rescued years ago from abandonment and proof that cats aren't the only animals to land on their feet, is a few feet away rolling on her back in the grass, squirming back and forth like a sidewinder. Paws going everywhere at once.

It's an iconic scene of style of life in mutli-million dollar houses that wouldn't exist without the area's most important natural asset, Lake St. Clair.



Steel seawalls, such as this one at Kay Felt's lakefront home in Grosse Pointe Shores, used to keep the lake at bay, but now they merely act as landscaping edging due to accretion piling up.
Photo by Brad Lindberg

"What else do we have in Grosse Pointe to rival the northern Oakland County lakes? We have the panorama of the lake," said Felt, an attorney with a firm in downtown Detroit. "We don't have great shopping. We don't have great entertainment."

She motioned with her right hand past Nicky's flailing paws and windswept puffs of shedding fur to Lake St. Clair beyond.

"This is what we have," Felt said.

These days Felt and her neighbors have more than they bargained for.

Property north of Vernier to the 900 block of Lakeshore is being set upon by a creeping mass of silt (accretion) piling upon the shoreline at a regular rate.

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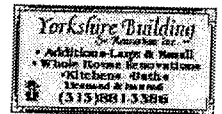
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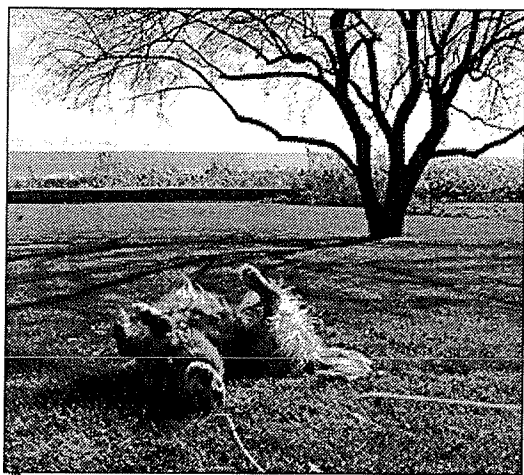
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Nicky doesn't mind the buildup of accretion along the shoreline north of Vernier in Grosse Pointe Shores, but her master, Kay Felt, does. "It's just going to get worse," Felt said. "It's time to do something about it." Photo by Brad Lindberg

In places where the sediment has been accumulating for years, it has solidified into firm ground dotted by low spots filled with stagnant water. In newer spots, it's just a mucky combination of mud and decaying vegetation. Throughout the area grow small trees and tall weeds, including invasive purple loe-strife.

"(Accretion) grows northward by about 100 feet per year," Felt said.

It also grows outward into the lake. Those waves breaking out of earshot hundreds of yards offshore used to pound against Felt's steel breakwall.

Beneath the bottom rung of her breakwall ladder is a thick, black, stagnant goop crusted with grass and leaves.

During summer months, accretion generates a stench that, during onshore breezes, forces Felt indoors with windows shut.

"It's an overwhelming combination of rotten vegetables — if you've ever had a compost and opened it — and dead fish," she said.

Over the top edge of the breakwall there's the sound of an unseen animal wrestling through the scrub.

"A rat, probably," Felt said.

She and many of her neighbors blame accretion in the area on expansion of Shores Osius Park and the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club. Construction at the facilities involved closing shoreline tunnels which used to let lakeside currents carry suspended particles of dirt downstream. Now currents get backed up and deposit sediment.

Felt and others point to a 1990 study commissioned by the Shores that comes to the same conclusion.

As Shores officials consider plans to update their municipal harbor at Osius Park, Felt wants to make sure renovation includes an emphasis on replacing the former flow-throughs.

"In addition to cutting off the flow-throughs, they also put sheet metal piling on the north wall that deflects (waves) back," Felt said. "They need to reopen some major flow-throughs. Then they need to reconfigure that north wall."

She said deflected waves bounce back at an angle that adds to sediment deposits along the shoreline and buildup of sandbars

offshore.

"If they made it a rock or rubble wall, depending on how they positioned it, waves would go out instead of up," Felt said.

Although the problem is piling up against her property, she said the issue has economic consequences for inland Shores property owners.

"It affects everyone's property values eventually," she said. "If these (lakeside) houses don't hold their value, then what is there across the way?"

Felt's accretion is hidden from public view. A visible version exists above Pier Park at the foot of Moross in Grosse Pointe Farms.

"I'm shocked at how quickly it's been moving in the Farms," Felt said. "That was caused by something very similar – they enlarged their parking lot and cut off their flow-through. See how quickly that is growing? That's going to grow all the way to the yacht club if it's not stopped."

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.



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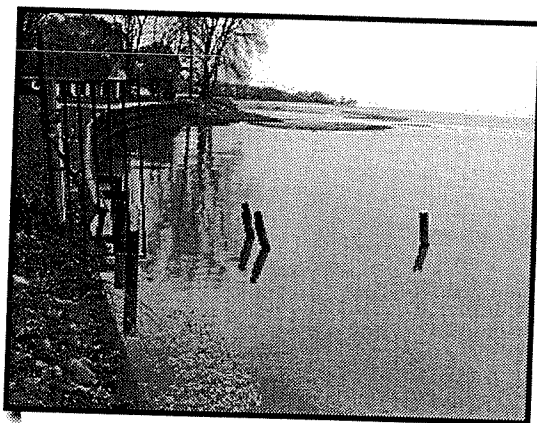
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No money dug up for dredging in the Shores

Brad Lindberg

write the author



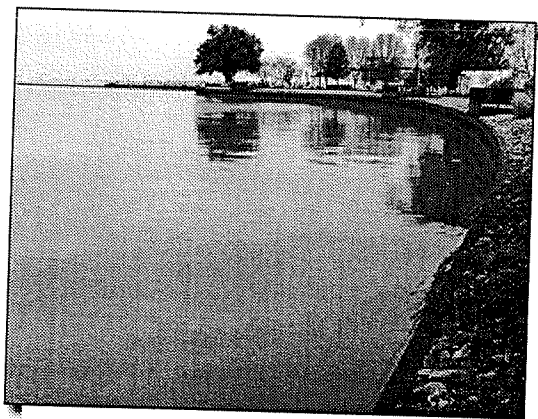
Photos by Brad Lindberg As accretion builds against landfill on private property north of Vernier in Grosse Pointe Shores, above, water still laps against the north breakwall at Osius Park, below.

11/24/2005 - Despite hopes of state or federal aid to help dredge accretion from a section of the Grosse Pointe Shores shoreline, no funding sources have been found.

Some Shores residents are seeking grants in case they win approval from government regulators to allow lakeside dredging.

Residents hope for financial help to remove approximately 160,000 cubic yards of silt and sand deposited or washed ashore north of Vernier.

In many areas the deposits are an unwalkable, smelly muck. In others the ground has solidified enough to support entire tracts of unwanted vegetation gone wild.



Shores officials estimate dredging the 80-acre area would cost \$7 million.

"It would help me evaluate this proposal if I knew where that \$7 million was to come from," Shores President Dr. James Cooper wrote to one of the dredging applicants last march. "If the

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proposal is approved by the government, do you and the other applicants plan to ask the village to pay some or all of these costs, or ask a court to order the village to do so?"

The Pointes' state representative and senator agreed months ago to research the matter but haven't come up with anything.

Now a university scientist for whom government grants are essential to fund studies of Lake St. Clair and the Great Lakes has come up empty handed on behalf of Shores officials.

Dr. Guy Meadows, director of University of Michigan hydrodynamics laboratories within the department of naval architecture and marine engineering, was asked recently if any of his sources knew of money available for dredging.

"I asked Guy, who I know as a friend, if he could contact the (Michigan) Department of Environmental Quality and (U.S. Army) Corps of Engineers to see if there's any funds available," said Mike Kenyon, Shores village manager.

"I made several phone calls to determine the possibility of either state or federal assistance to local communities for dredging operations," Meadows said in his written response to Kenyon dated Oct. 31.

Meadows contacted decision makers in two units of the state Department of Environmental Quality. Both leads led nowhere.

Meadows said the head of the coastal zone management division "reported no such monies are available for dredging."

The head of the submerged lands management unit also reported "no state aid is available for dredging activities." Furthermore, Meadows was told that "dredging along the open coast as contemplated by the Grosse Pointe Shores (residents) is not a 'permissible' activity" and would be opposed by state regulators.

Things didn't get better on the federal level.

"Under the Water Resources Act, some recreational boating harbor dredging had been funded through the Corps of Engineers," Meadows said. "This funding has been limited to small levels of support, was within existing harbors and required Congressional appropriation. This funding was also targeted at the elimination of high levels of contaminated sediments from harbor sites."

Accretion has been building up north of Vernier for decades.

Some residents blame the problem on landfills used to construct Shores Osius Park and the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club. Landfills projecting into the lake interrupt currents that used to carry sediment downstream, according to the residents.

Shores officials and others have a counter argument. They cite a lack of accretion along the park shoreline and breakwall. Rather, they look upstream of the park to Hawthorne Point and where a lakeside homeowner dumped landfill in the lake.

The area being debated is generally out of public view behind private homes.

The public can see a similar but smaller area of accretion north of Farms Pier Park at Moross and Lakeshore.

Kay Felt, a Lakeshore homeowner and one of the Shores residents seeking a dredging permit, said accretion — and its attendant odor of rotting vegetation and unsightliness — is threatening her property values.

"If we do not have the panorama of the lake, what will convince people to move to the Grosse Pointe area or to stay here," Felt

said. "There are too many other lovely communities with great schools, good shopping, wonderful dining and entertainment. Doing nothing causes one more property to be overcome by this devastation with every passing year."

Hugo Higbie, a Grosse Pointe Farms resident with more than 50 years working in the local real estate business, said concerns about maintaining lakeside property values should be shared by inland homeowners.

"The lake is our most important asset to affect property values," Higbie told Shores trustees last week. "If we start seeing property values erode along the lake, be it in the Shores or Farms, we are in deep trouble. It is going to affect your whole tax base. I can't tell you how concerned I am."

In 2001 Meadows secured grants to design and locate a data collection buoy in the northwest section of Lake St. Clair. The buoy was designed to detect E.coli bacteria, record weather conditions and track wind, waves and currents.

Later, Meadows was unable to obtain funding for an expanded network of buoys and radar systems to measure and chart surface currents. One of the proposed radar sites was atop the Grosse Pointe War Memorial.

Meadows hoped to collect and correlate data for creation of a computer model to track everything from pollution spills and sewage discharges. Coast Guard officials were interested in using Meadows' model to predict where currents would most likely carry overboard boaters needing rescue.

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.



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Shores harbor plan to reduce accretion

Brad Lindberg

write the author

11/24/2005 - By Brad Lindberg

Staff Writer

The master plan accepted this month for Osius Park marina includes a new north breakwall designed to stop accumulation of silt and sand along the Grosse Pointe Shores shoreline above Vernier.

Yet harbor renovations are not intended to remove existing accretion.

"Accretion that's there is not going to be solved by anything we do in this harbor," said Trustee Karl Kratz, head of the park and harbor committee. "All we hope to do is enhance the current flow-through."

Trustees have two main tactics in mind to thwart continued accretion and sandbars upstream of the marina at Lakeshore and Vernier:

- replace the existing solid northern breakwall with a structure containing enough openings to let shoreline currents flow through the marina downstream, and
- line the outer portion of the new steel breakwall with stone to absorb waves that presently reflect upstream against the natural flow of water to deposit silt and create sandbars.

Such methods are expected to end in-shore conditions where the existing harbor breakwall blocks downstream currents and waves.

"Design criteria might be to overkill the flow-through," said Ron Schults, founder and chief executive officer of the Abonmarche Group, a coastal engineering and harbor design firm in Benton Harbor. "We want five times more flow-through than a hydraulic analysis might indicate."

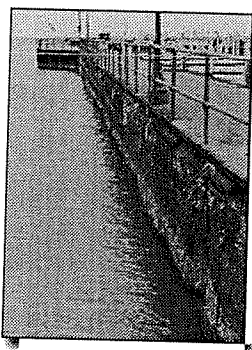
Abonmarche won a contract last May to design the harbor master plan.

"This may not solve some of the problems of lakefront owners north of Vernier, but we definitely don't want to cause anymore problems," said Dr. James Cooper, Shores president.

Schults said state and federal regulators wouldn't allow any construction that would contribute to existing problems in Lake St. Clair or along the shoreline.

Although plans for the harbor are in the concept stage, goals include replacing crumbling, wobbly and deteriorating docks, improving utility service to individual wells, revising well sizes to accommodate new generations of wider pleasure craft, simplifying traffic patterns and redesigning the northern breakwall.

Decades ago the harbor wall was essentially a series of bridges.



Efforts are under way in Grosse Pointe Shores to replace the crumbling north breakwall at Osius Park with a structure that would allow currents to flow downstream and absorb rather than reflect waves. Photo by Brad Lindberg (click for larger version)

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Mike Kenyon, village manager, hoped Abonmarche engineers would be able to create about 220 feet of flow-through along the north wall.

"I'm not sure we can get that entire 220 feet because we're putting stone out in front to reduce wave energy," Schultz said. "But we can look at additional circulation in isolated areas."

"Items we're doing (such as flow-throughs and stone) are intended to reduce accretion and certainly not accelerate it," Kratz said. "We have made it very clear that it would have to be part of this master plan."

An emphasis on increased water circulation and reduced accretion pleased many Shores residents dissatisfied with an earlier harbor concept that listed only a couple of flow-throughs measuring 30 inches in diameter.

"Thirty inches? It seemed a pinhole to me," said Mary Ann LaHood, resident. She said larger breakwall openings hadn't been discussed during two years of meetings she attended of a special committee charged with designing a master plan for the harbor.

"I think when (trustees) saw the number of people interested in flow-through, it became a much stronger issue," LaHood said.

Jack Caldwell, a Lakeshore resident who has said accretion piling up along his backyard breakwall is hurting property values, was encouraged by news of a revised new harbor wall.

"Whether it will be adequate, we need to wait and see," Caldwell said.

William Gilbride, attorney for a Lakeshore homeowner having the same problem as Caldwell, called increased flow-throughs a "step in the right direction. It's acknowledgement that the harbor itself has been a contributing cause of that accretion."

"It isn't just a little bit of flow-through; they have to do it in a meaningful way," said Kay Felt, another Lakeshore homeowner. "Remember, there were bridges there. Huge amounts of flowed-through previously."

Felt and some of her neighbors have asked state and federal regulators to allow accretion to be dredged and hauled away.

In September Shores trustees reviewed a three-phase harbor renovation concept that could be implemented over 20 years and cost between \$2 million to \$6 million. The degree of renovation hasn't been determined.

All phases include replacing the north breakwall and addressing accretion.

Phases one and two differ mainly in the number of docks to be replaced.

Phase three is the most comprehensive, most expensive and, according to Shores and Abonmarche representatives who have been consulting boat owners and residents, most likely to raise concerns. Phase three involves converting a section of park land into boat wells.

Phase three also shifts the harbor entrance from the downstream wall of the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club to the east wall facing the lake. The new entrance would require construction of an additional breakwall extending into the lake.

"Phases can be done at different points of time," said Bruce Kopf, chairman of the harbor master plan committee. "Phase three would probably be done five or 10 years in the future."

Most of the construction will be paid from the municipal harbor

fund, created and maintained through annual well rentals.

General tax monies will be used only to pay for features accessible to the general public, such as the main breakwall that effectively doubles as a scenic pathway from which residents can fish and view lake activity.

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.



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Stink raised over buildup of accretion

Brad Lindberg

write the author



The landlocked condition of Rankin Peck's boathouse (in the distance), which he now calls a beach house, is often cited as a consequence of accretion on the Lake St. Clair shoreline north of Vernier in Grosse Pointe Shores. File photo by Brad Lindberg

01/19/2006 - \During his 35 years reporting news on Channel 2, Joe Weaver was the Detroit broadcast market's equivalent of E.F. Hutton. When Weaver spoke, people listened.

Speaking last week with the same confident voice the retired newsman broadcasted issues of his day, Weaver showed he still doesn't pull punches.

"Things are changing in a different direction in the Grosse Pointes," said Weaver, a Grosse Pointe Shores homeowner.

He spoke to about 100 people gathered at the War Memorial to discuss consequences of soil and vegetation building up along parts of the once-unobstructed Lake St. Clair shoreline.

"I don't know how many of you have had your property appraised in the last couple of weeks," Weaver said. "We had ours appraised. We lost about \$500,000 value."

Most of Weaver's problem is the soft real estate market for expensive homes.

Many people he was speaking to while moderating a forum on accretion organized by Sen. Martha Scott, D-Highland Park, fear property values will drop even more. They fear the shine of Grosse Pointe living is being tarnished by a shoreline clogged with washed up sand, overgrown weeds, smelly dead fish and rotting vegetation.

Main examples are north of municipal harbors in the Farms and Shores.

Red alert

"I'm warning you — warning the municipalities, warning everybody — if you don't clean up accretion, you will have lake[side] real estate properties drop," said Hugo Higbie, Farms resident and

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more than 50-year veteran of the local real estate industry.

If accretion goes unchecked, Higbie told the War Memorial gathering, economic fallout affecting shoreline homeowners is sure to migrate inland.

"This is one of the most serious problems I've seen in Grosse Pointe today," Higbie said. "Lake St. Clair is incredibly valuable to all Grosse Pointe. We have to protect that water. We have to protect that shoreline."

Decreased lakefront property values could trigger cascading effects throughout the Pointes.

Reduced home values mean reduced tax assessments, which, unless property tax rates are increased, mean less revenue for cities to maintain high levels of services that help make the Pointes a desirable place to live and invest in houses.

"If we don't do something about this and it gets worse, people who live along the shore will mass together and say we want our taxes reduced by half," said Rankin Peck, Shores resident. "Who's going to pick that up? The other 54,000 people who live in the Grosse Pointes."

Peck's family has owned a house in the 800 block of Lakeshore for 65 years.

For most of that time, the back yard overlooked a boathouse propped over at least three feet of water lapping against the seawall.

In recent years, as accretion piled up along the shoreline and waves succumbed to scrub grass, shrubs and weed trees, Peck's boathouse has become landlocked. It also has been anointed by accretion critics as the unofficial symbol of bad things to come if accretion isn't reversed or at least stopped.

Peck is one of many residents blaming accretion on construction of Shores Osius Park and Grosse Pointe Yacht Club, both of which are on landfill jutting into the lake. Such projections interrupt near-shore currents which formerly carried silt and sand downstream.

"Silt hits those seawalls, bounces back and falls onto the bottom of the lake," said Jack Caldwell, Peck's neighbor. "When I moved (onto Lakeshore) 16 years ago, I had three feet of water below my seawall. I now can walk out probably 300 feet (beyond the seawall) before I get my feet wet. If we continue to let that grow, we will have a marsh out there full of sludge."

That's not the image wanted by a mature residential community competing against numerous up-and-coming Detroit suburbs for a new generation of well-heeled home buyers.

"I don't want to see Grosse Pointe going down to failure," said Warren Wilkinson, City of Grosse Pointe resident and president of newly-formed Neighbors Concerned about the Lakefront, or NCLF (comprised of former members of now-disbanded Neighbors Concerned about Yacht Club Expansion, or NYCE).

"With accretion — the look, the smell and awful water — we're not going to have anything," Wilkinson said. "We don't want to lose this battle."

Some solutions

About a half-dozen Shores residents want 160,000 cubic yards of accretion (spread over 80 acres) dredged and shipped away, thereby returning the shoreline to the way it was in about 40 years ago. That's when some tunnels were filled in that had let shoreline currents carry sediment through the Shores and yacht club harbors.

"Since that time, accumulation has developed north of the harbor," said Joann Ross, a Grosse Pointe Park attorney representing dredging applicants.

Because the area in question belongs to the state, dredging requires permission from the state and federal officials.

The initial dredging application was subject to several objections during a public hearing in June 2005 at Parcels Middle School.

"General objections were adverse impacts to fisheries, waterfowl nesting, loafing areas, water quality issues," said Andrew Hartz, of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Land and Water Management Division. Hartz's division administers laws concerning construction activity in the state's lakes, rivers, streams, ponds, wetlands and Great Lakes.

"Dredging is a very expensive solution that might not be the ecologically best one," said Christie McGillivray, Lake St. Clair community organizer of Clean Water Fund in Clinton Township. "We don't want to create more of a problem by taking drastic steps and in the long term hurt the ecology of the lake."

Applicants have temporarily withdrawn their petition to address concerns.

Another problem

Assuming that dredging permit is issued, how to fund the project looms as an even bigger problem. Cost estimates approach \$7 million.

William Gilbride, attorney for owners of a house in the 800 block of Lakeshore, said his clients "are looking for a fair and equitable way to shoulder the cost of cleaning (accretion) and restoring the natural flow. Cost should be born by a much wider group of people, not just residents who live and are most affected by accretion in front of their homes. We'd like to see the cost born by the state, village and city as well as residents who live along there."

It will take some fishing to find money in Lansing available for dredging.

"I serve on the appropriations committee," said Sen. Scott. "We don't have any money. But if all of us elected officials could come together, maybe we can find money someplace."

"The federal government is the place to go," said Rep. Edward Gaffney, R-Grosse Pointe Farms, attending the forum.

"The county cares about the accretion problem," said Christopher Cavanaugh, the Pointes' Wayne County commissioner, also attending. "We pledge to help. It's up to the state to get us a lot of money."

A less expensive and less comprehensive compromise would be to install powerful pumps to usher shoreline currents around Osius Park and the yacht club.

"Sediment bypass should restore natural shoreline littoral currents," said John Booth, a dredging applicant and Shores lakeside resident for 25 years. "However, it will do nothing to remove existing accretion. There seems to be some consensus forming for sediment bypass to be a first step. Dredging is a big issue and perhaps can be addressed later. Sediment flow-through is critical."

"Flow-through sounds like a great idea," McGillivray said.

When Booth looks out his back window, he doesn't like what he sees.

"Not only does accretion grow north, it also grows out into the lake," he said. "There is a large sandbar forming. It's about 1,000 feet offshore. When that sandbar breaks water, it will backfill all the way to the shoreline."

Booth foresees a near future with hundreds of acres of accretion separating former lakeside properties from the actual shoreline. The mixture of sand, soil, weeds and whatever washes up will stretch from Osius Park to Gaukler Pointe, site of the Ford House.

"All of those (shoreline) properties are going to be separated from the state by hundreds and hundreds of feet of vegetation," Booth said. "That's the kind of real estate decline they're talking about."

"It's important to get working on it to make something happen," Scott said. "It's not going to go away. We need to deal with it. Let's get this done before it gets worse."

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.



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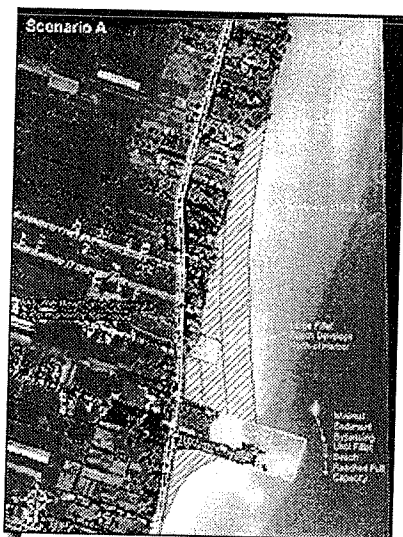
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Accretion may grow to 45 acres

Grosse Pointe Shores

Brad Lindberg

write the author



Even if Hawthorne Peninsula were removed, as represented in this aerial photograph of the Grosse Pointe Shores shoreline above Vernier, the harbor wall of Osius Park would trap enough sediment to create the indicated accretion, according to a study by W.F. Baird & Associates Coastal Engineers. Illustration by W.F. Baird & Associates

04/27/2006 - A large beach is building on western Lake St. Clair above Vernier.

Wave by wave, grain by grain, shoreline currents are delivering silt and sand to a crescent-shaped indentation on the north shore.

If left alone, deposits will eventually fill 45 acres of shallows extending from Grosse Pointe Shores Osius Park to about halfway toward Gaukler Point, the site of the Edsel & Eleanor Ford Estate.

Additional deposits will extend nearly one block along westbound Lakeshore downstream of the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club, where just a small pocket of sediment appears now.

The forecast appears in a study commissioned by supporters of dredging 160,000 cubic yards of accretion they say already clogs the north shore area and threatens property values of lakeside houses that aren't so lakeside anymore.

The area is largely beyond public view behind million-dollar lots in the 800 to 900 block of Lakeshore.

The most accessible public dry-land perspective is from the outer docks of Shores park marina and yacht club.

"The study shows that in terms of trapping littoral currents, the problem is the harbor structures," said John Booth, a Lakeshore

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homeowner and dredging advocate. He wants waves piling against his breakwall, not sand, mud, weeds, washed-up rotting vegetation and dead fish.

Booth and others have spent more than \$200,000 studying the cause of accretion along the north shore.

The most recent report was completed in March by W.F. Baird & Associates Coastal Engineers, office in Madison, Wisc. Scientists used a series of aerial photographs dating to 1937 plus mathematical analysis to predict evolution of the Shores shoreline following expansion of the municipal harbor in the mid-1960s.

"The north harbor wall is ... the major factor contributing to deposition in the accretion zone," according to the report's many conclusions.

Booth and others are compiling data they said proves that the municipal harbor causes more accretion than Hawthorne Peninsula, a jut of private landfill near the foot of Hawthorne road adjacent to Osius Park's upstream border.

"Sediment flow-through was cut off when the old Grosse Pointe Shores wharf was filled in 1967," Booth said. "All accretion in Grosse Pointe Shores dates from that decision by the (village) council."

Last month's Baird study concluded that Hawthorne Peninsula can only trap enough sediment to create 2.5 acres of accretion.

"The peninsula only extends into Lake St. Clair for approximately 25 percent of the harbor length," the report reads. "The overall trapping potential for the harbor [assuming Hawthorne Peninsula didn't exist] is almost 20 times greater than the Hawthorne Peninsula."

The peninsula and marina combine to interrupt shoreline currents and cause accretion.

"Nonetheless, it can be shown that the maximum trapping potential for Hawthorne Peninsula alone is less than 5 percent of the maximum trapping potential of the harbor," according to the report.

Interruption of shoreline currents has been a contentious issue in the Shores since the late 1990s. At that time yacht club officials wanted to expand the harbor and Shores marina, which share an entrance and some fairways, an additional 300 feet into the lake.

Shores officials scaled down their plans. They and many residents now want to renovate the aging marina within its existing footprint. Construction could exceed \$2.6 million.

Yacht club officials have signed on for combined construction that will cost less than two separate projects.

Booth and others want the new harbor designed with portals, or water flow-throughs, in the outer breakwalls to prevent the build-up of more sediment. Portals would not carry away existing accretion.

"(Flow through) should be incorporated into the design before they begin construction," Booth said. "None of us want to see a harbor redesigned at great cost to the residents that doesn't take this into consideration now. It's going to be a lot more expensive to retrofit."

"There's about 220 feet of flow-through there now," said Mike Kenyon, village manager. "We certainly don't want to eliminate that."

Design of the municipal harbor is a work in progress. Kenyon said club officials should be finished with their half of the plans in

about three weeks. Before construction begins, designs must be approved through a permitting process with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Studies associated with the permit will focus on the new harbor's impact on waves, shoreline currents, sediment, fish and harbor flushing.

"They will give us more insight into what needs to be done," Kenyon said. "We're waiting for the yacht club to (decide on a harbor plan) so we can submit our (construction) permit. But the time to discuss this is when we get before the DEQ and Corps of Engineers. I could talk to (our engineers) all day about flow-throughs, but I want to hear what the DEQ says. (DEQ regulators) are not about to talk to me about that until I get to a point where I have an application in their hands they can look at."

Warren Wilkinson, head of a group of residents concerned about the lakefront and a resident of the City of Grosse Pointe, said that in addition to building flow-throughs, a sand bypassing system could be installed at the marina for between \$1.7 and \$2.2 million, plus \$10,000 operating costs.

"Pumps won't do anything about accretion already there, but we don't want it to get any worse," Wilkinson said.

Unofficial cost estimates to dredge existing accretion have reached \$7 million.

"I don't have \$7 million to do it," Kenyon said.

Kay Felt, another dredging advocate and Lakeshore resident in the Shores, had city finances on her mind last week when she warned Shores trustees to solve the accretion problem.

If the shoreline deteriorates and causes loss in property values, taxes will also have to be lowered, straining municipal services, Felt said.

"You are going to have to reduce everyone's expenditures or increase everyone else's taxes," she said.

Mary Ann LaHood, Shores resident, compared the north shore to the tenderloin of a cow.

"That's the nicest part of Lakeshore and the biggest draw for taxes," she said. "What if it's decreasing in value? Something has to give."

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.



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Accretion impacts everyone

September 29, 2005

We are not a muckraking publication; nor do we like dredging up bad news, but something has to be done about accretion.

The problem has built up over the years and shows no signs of dissipating. The problem is accretion along the Lake St. Clair shoreline.

In Grosse Pointe Shores, north of Osius Park, some 160,000 cubic yards of sand, dirt and vegetation have accumulated over 80 acres of former lake bottom. Deposits have altered 4,065 feet of shoreline and in some cases topped the breakwall.

That does not include the accretion south of the yacht club at the breakwall; nor does it include the huge, overgrown corner at the north Grosse Pointe Farms Pier Park breakwall at the shoreline near Moross.

North of the yacht club and the Shores' municipal park, the accretion is so bad that sand has buried the breakwall. Onshore winds carry the nasty odor of decaying vegetation and stagnant water inland and into the back yards of some of Grosse Pointe's nicest properties.

The accreted area is former lake bottom, which belongs to the state of Michigan. The land may have once belonged to the bygone ribbon farm pioneers, who relied on docks and water transportation. But sometime years ago, the state took away "riparian rights" in order to protect the lake for future generations.

It was just 20 years ago when we experienced the opposite problem of today. Lake levels were high then. Lakeshore property owners were forced to extend the height of their breakwalls in order to protect their property from flooding. Marinas had to dramatically raise docks at considerable expense to accommodate the higher lake levels.

Today the pendulum has reached the other extreme. Lake St. Clair has steadily declined during the past decades. Lake bottom once covered with several feet of water is now exposed. Waves crashing against breakwalls no longer move sediment downstream. Sand piles up against obstructions, most of them manmade.

How long lake levels will remain low we do not know. We recall reading a Detroit News story some years back by former Grosse Pointe News writer Tom Greenwood reporting that Lake St. Clair will eventually — perhaps in another millennium — become one big marsh clear to Canada.

In coming weeks, we will attempt to do more research on the lake and try to come up with expert predictions on what to expect in the short- and long-term future of Lake St. Clair.

Some people may view accretion as merely a "rich people's problem." After all, they are the ones immediately affected. But such a sentiment would be misguided.

The nasty, unsightly conditions caused by excessive accretion drive property values down and have an adverse impact on the desirability of Grosse Pointe as a whole.

While we can understand the state's desire to "protect" the lake from undue encroachment, we also believe some reasonableness needs to be given to the property owners and communities negatively affected by accretion.

For now, as reported in this week's Grosse Pointe News, petitioners in the Shores who want their accretion abated have withdrawn their request before the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. The rescinding of the request was strategic. The petitioners will be back.

In the meantime, we hope unbiased information about accretion and the future of the lake can be presented and that a reasoned approach can be taken to remedy a problem that affects everyone, not just lakefront homeowners.

•

In another lake-related matter, the Shores and Farms municipalities were recently notified by the Michigan DEQ that unless they seal all sewer outfalls into Lake St. Clair, they face up to \$25,000-a-day fines

This comes after the Farms, Park and Shores have spent millions of dollars separating sanitary and storm sewers.

When the cities had combined sanitary and storm sewers, heavy rains would often swamp the systems' capacity and force the combined storm and sanitary effluents to overflow at outfalls into the lake.

Since the storm and sanitary systems have been separated, sewage outflows into the lake have been nonexistent. It could happen, given a 100-year rain, because home foundations are still connected to the sanitary system, but such a rain would be extremely rare.

We have made tremendous progress from the "old days" when combined sewage overflows were frequent occurrences. Too bad our efforts are being met with threats of \$25,000-a-day fines instead of congratulations.

We hope that between now and the Nov. 30 deadline the state agrees to look at the municipalities individually and makes reasonable requests based on the degree of possible risk.

Shores dredging request on hold

by Brad Lindberg

September 29, 2005

Efforts are on hold to clear accretion from the shoreline north of Vernier.

State environmental regulators this month confirmed withdrawal of a dredging permit application submitted last spring by John and Becky Booth of Grosse Pointe Shores.

"They withdrew the application to give them more time to respond to objections on the record," said Andrew Hartz of the DEQ-Land and Water Management Division.

"We asked for a suspension, but technically it is withdrawn," said Becky Booth.

The Booths and some of their neighbors want to dredge 160,000 cubic yards of sand, dirt and vegetation that has spread over 80 acres along the Lake St. Clair shoreline. Deposits have altered the shoreline and in some cases topped the breakwall.

Environmental laws require dredging applicants to win state and federal permission before altering lake bottoms, which are state-owned.

The public had until June 24 to comment on the application. After that, regulators had 90 days to weigh comments and make a ruling.

"Within that time, our expert was traveling and couldn't respond to some of the public comment and some additional documents dealing with scientific issues," Becky Booth said. "It gives our scientist time to be able to respond to things that need a scientific answer."

"This procedure is not uncommon," said Mark McNerney, Shores municipal attorney. "They can resubmit the application within six months."

If the application is resubmitted, regulators have another 90 days to rule.

"The application has been withdrawn, but it really hasn't," McNerney said. "We're looking to next summer for a decision to be reached."

McNerney is involved because applicants want the Shores to help pay for dredging, claiming the problem is man-made due to landfills, including modifications to Osius municipal park. Cost estimates reach \$ 7 million.

The Booths are among five lakeside property owners wanting to dredge enough accreted material to restore the shoreline to pre-1960 conditions. Thirty one land owners live along the contested stretch of lake.

"The sediment proposed to be dredged has been determined to be clean, not contaminated," Hartz said.

Although the 4,065-foot-long area targeted for dredging is located behind houses and out of general public view, onshore winds carrying the stench of decaying muck and rotting vegetation attest to conditions critics say are getting worse.

"This sediment build-up will not disappear on its own," said Mary Anne LaHood, Shores property owner overlooking accretion south of Vernier. "In fact, this sediment has become increasingly solidified and covered by vegetation."

An easy example to view is in Grosse Pointe Farms. A growing landmass anchors dense vegetation at the 90-degree juncture of upstream breakwalls protecting Lakeshore and Pier Park north of Moross.

Until a few decades ago waves broke against the Lakeshore breakwall. Years passed, and the lake receded from record high levels of the 1980s. Sediment deposited by incoming waves and the interruption of shoreline currents, blamed on the Pier Park breakwall, created a beach. Now most of the beach is overgrown. Sections of seawall are buried.

A lesser version of a beach is developing upstream of a man-made peninsula at the foot of Harbor Hill, also in the Farms.

In all cases accretion is occurring against man-made landmasses projecting into Lake St. Clair.

Booth and fellow applicants in the Shores claim their problem stems from construction of Osius municipal park, the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club and attendant marinas. Shores officials cite landfill north of the park and club where a resident extended his back yard beyond the regular shoreline.

Accretion forum Jan. 12 at G.P. War Memorial

by Brad Lindberg

January 05, 2006

Accretion along parts of the western Lake St. Clair shoreline is changing how Grosse Pointers see their community's greatest natural asset.

As sand and soil accumulate north of municipal parks in the Shores and Farms, vistas of Lake St. Clair are becoming blocked from view.

During summer months, on-shore winds pick up the odor of washed-up and rotting vegetation, dead fish and a growing quagmire of soupy soil reminiscent of a compost heap.

The Pointes' elected voices in Lansing have been unable to come up with a remedy.

Next week, Rep Edward Gaffney, R-Grosse Pointe Farms, and Sen. Martha Scott, D-Highland Park, will host an open forum on accretion. Members of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality are scheduled to participate.

The forum starts at 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 12, at the War Memorial, 32 Lakeshore, Grosse Pointe Farms.

"We're hoping that by getting everyone who's interested in it together — neighbors, environmental groups and local officials — that it will become clear what needs to be done and how to do it," Gaffney said.

"This issue is of grave importance to property owners and other citizens," Scott said. "Being responsive, accessible and accountable to the residents is one of my top priorities."

Several Grosse Pointe Shores residents are preparing to seek permission from state officials to dredge accretion along the shoreline above Vernier. Hopes remain for state or federal funding to help pay for the estimated \$5 million project.

Topics during the forum will include the possibility of dredging, the cost of dredging, who would pay and environmental impacts, if any.

Michigan regulators have said no money exists for dredging.

"Things are tight with the state," Gaffney said.

He hopes the forum will evolve into a brain storming session that results in a clearer picture of the cause of accretion and how it can be addressed in a fiscal and environmental manner.

Overgrowth along shoreline may be hewn

Grosse Pointe Farms

by Brad Lindberg

March 30, 2006

Farms officials have retained an environmental consultant and plan to partner with lakeside residents to at least groom vegetation growing on accretion near the park.

"We retained Environmental Consulting Technology, of Ann Arbor, to look at our accretion area and see what we can do to improve the looks of it," said Shane Reeside, city manager. "They came in with GIS (geographic information system) mapping to identify the makeup of the accretion and are recommending that most of the existing vegetation, which is invasive phragmites, be removed."

Phragmites can grow nearly 20 feet tall in dense stands.

A landscape plan with native Michigan plants is being considered.

A permit is needed to groom the area, which owned by the state.

"We'll be setting up a meeting with adjoining neighbors to try to get their support in a joint application to the Department of Environmental Quality," Reeside said. "The state has an interest because the accretion is below the high water mark. Adjoining property owners have an interest because they look onto it and they may have riparian rights. We have an interest because it impacts everyone in the community. We want to clean up that site."

In addition to the short term strategy of dressing up the accretion area, Farms officials want a long-term solution to sediments being deposited in the area.

However, a flow-through culvert near Lakeshore would most likely be ineffective.

Shores won't dredge

Accretion removal delayed for 2 years

by Brad Lindberg

March 30, 2006

An application to dredge sediment from the shoreline north of Vernier is being shelved for up to two years.

State and federal environmental officials agreed to hold the application dormant at the request of its sponsors.

In the meantime, an international study of the effects of dredging the 27-foot-deep shipping channel might indicate why sediment is settling along parts of Lake St. Clair's western shore.

"A report on that study is to be issued sometime in 2008," according to Grosse Pointes' state Sen. Martha Scott, R-Highland Park.

The International Joint Commission, comprised of United States and Canadian representatives from states and provinces within the Great Lakes basin, commissioned the report.

Its purpose is to determine how the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredging of the St. Clair River system has effected water quality and levels of Lake St. Clair.

"Dredging in Lake Huron and the St. Clair River may have contributed to raising the volume of sediment suspended in the water," said Joanne Fitzgerald Ross, attorney for a group of mainly northshore Grosse Pointe Shores homeowners who originally filed the dredging application last year.

"There is concern that (the Corps) took up too much riverbed and didn't put down material to keep the riverbed where it was supposed to stay," said Becky Booth, a dredging applicant and member of Neighbors Concerned about the Lake Front. "That might be one reason we have all this accretion out there. It has to come from someplace."

"If the Corps made a mistake, then, ironically, the Corps could be liable for some of this damage and therefore be a source of funding for dredging as part of remediation," said John Booth, Becky Booth's husband.

The area proposed for dredging measures about 4,000 feet above Shores Osius Park toward Gaukler Point and to slightly more than 1,000 feet offshore.

Unofficial cost estimates reach \$7 million to dredge and dispose of the 125,000 cubic yards of accretion, or sediment released when water flows too slowly to suspend particles of earth.

Members of the Lake Front group claim construction of and modifications to the upstream breakwall of Osius Park, plus closing water flow-throughs at Grosse Pointe Yacht Club, created the barrier that blocked inshore currents, causing accretion.

Shores officials reject the claim and haven't signed onto the dredging application.

A comparable but much smaller area of accretion is expanding north of Grosse Pointe Farms Pier Park at the foot of Moross. Waves that used to slap the breakwall now roll onto a wedge of earth thick enough to support 10-foot trees.

Farms officials have retained environmental consultants to at least landscape their accretion and keep the area from expanding.

The International Joint Commission retained W.F. Baird & Associates Coastal Engineers of Toronto, Ont., to study riverbed dredging. The Booth's retained Baird in 1998 to study accretion in connection with proposed expansion of the municipal and Yacht Club harbors.

Baird last year completed a six-month study for Canadian clients about how dredging the St. Clair River contributed to "ongoing erosion" of the riverbed.

Parts of the upper St. Clair River channel at Port Huron were found eroded to more than 60 feet deep. Dredging contributed

to, but most likely wasn't the only factor leading to, a "significant" 8 to 13-inch lowering of Lakes Michigan and Huron from 1960 to 2003, according to the study.

"This drop represents an irreversible decline in the long-term average lake levels without compensation measures," according to the report summary.

The St. Clair River chug-a-lugs an average of 5,200 cubic meters of water per second. But a Baird scientist said there is no linear correlation between channel dredging and accretion along the Pointe shoreline.

"I don't see a direct relationship there," said Rob Nairn, a Baird coastal river engineer and author of the recent study.

"Increased flows are almost unmeasurable. Not a lot (of sediment) moves down the river in the first place. Secondly, the area eroding is glacial till, and till would be mostly made up of clay particles."

Nairn said sediment being deposited off the Shores consists of silt and sand, which is lighter than clay.

"The lighter stuff gets stuck out in the middle of the lake," he said. "It doesn't end up on the shoreline."

How to fix accretion in the Shores

June 30, 2005

You can't fight Mother Nature. That is what lakeside property owners north of the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club know for a fact.

Since about the 1960s, accretion – the build up of sand along breakwalls – has been a mounting problem for property owners along the lake.

As evidenced by a photograph in last week's Grosse Pointe News of Rankin Peck's property and his boathouse that now has become a beach house due to accretion, the problem is severe, and it stinks – literally.

What used to be gently lapping water at the breakwall is now accumulated sand and rotting vegetation and debris.

What used to be gently sloping mowed lawn down to water's edge is now eclipsed by weedy, reedy, marginal flora.

The problem is extensive. Property owners in the affected area who have been studying the matter, estimate the accretion at some 160,000 cubic yards covering 80 acres. The cost of the dredging is ballparked at \$7 million.

The question is who will pay for it?

Obviously, since the former lake bottom outside the breakwall is considered state land, individual property owners do not want to foot the bill to maintain state real estate.

The Village of Grosse Pointe Shores likewise sees little benefit in helping the state.

And, as we all know, the state is struggling to make ends meet as it is. We doubt the governor and Legislature would be willing to spend money they do not have for the benefit of 31 lakeside property owners.

Then there is another problem. Once the accretion is dredged, there is nothing to stop it from coming back. So is dredging money well spent?

Property owners petitioning for the dredging say the accretion is due to decisions made long ago in building the Shores and yacht club marinas. The harbors, petitioners say, prevent the free flow of water and particulates along the coast.

As obstructions, the harbors cause the sand to settle and accumulate.

If they are correct, then dredging is only a temporary fix. The causes of the problem remain.

We have an idea that may meet everyone's needs.

Why not just deed the accreted property over to the affected property owners?

They would gain title to more land in exchange for paying for new breakwalls, hauling in topsoil and dredging if necessary to even out the new shoreline.

Further, the new breakwall could curve outward toward the tip of the harbor obstruction and provide for a better current flow.

Some might object, thinking residents are getting "free" public land for their own. But they fail to take into account the cost of rehabilitating the land.

They further forget the additional taxes the benefiting property owners will have to pay on the additional land. Additional local, county, state and school taxes would be generated for perpetuity.

As it stands now, the accreted area is a no-man's wasteland with little value to anyone. It is an eyesore and a stench.

Perhaps our idea is too simplistic, but whoever said simple was bad?

Shoreline grooming OK

April 13, 2006

It seems the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality has thrown a lifeline to communities suffering from accretion and low water levels.

Now property owners and municipalities along the lake can "groom" the former lake bottom of "invasive" plant growth.

That is good news for residents particularly in Grosse Pointe Farms and Shores who have stretches of now dry lake bottom that is being overgrown by not very attractive vegetation. Two large areas affected are at the northeast corner of Pier Park at Lakeshore near Moross and some 80 acres north of Vernier along the lake.

Andrew Hartz, a Grosse Pointer and district supervisor with the DEQ, said up to 40 percent of dry lake bottom can be mowed, and a 6-foot path can be constructed.

The state is particularly in favor of weeding out invasive plant species, such as the ubiquitous phragmites, which is pretty but destructive.

Mr. Hartz warns that anything more than "grooming" requires a permit and warns residents from excessive removal of vegetation.

Of course, cultivating the shoreline does nothing for accretion. Removal of soil requires permits from the state, feds and, probably, the chief executive himself.

Short of that, grooming appears to be something of a sop to lakefront property owners and communities.

Accretion: Pay now or pay later

by Brad Lindberg

October 27, 2005

Lakeshore residents can forget about masking accretion behind houses north of Vernier by extending the seawall into Lake St. Clair and backfilling the mucky shoreline with topsoil.

"No way, never," said Andrew Hartz, analyst in the state Department of Environmental Quality Land and Water Management Division.

Hartz's prediction spoils hopes by lakeside homeowner Jack Caldwell to camouflage existing accretion along a concave section of Grosse Pointe Shores shoreline.

The indented area links Gaukler Pointe, site of the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House, down to landfill created for Osius Park/Grosse Pointe Yacht Club.

"If you move the seawall out about 100 feet and backfill, then you would have a brand new, smooth seawall," Caldwell said.

He basically wants to cover accretion by extending the Shores into Lake St. Clair and onto state-owned bottom land frequented by wildlife.

"This area is highly productive in terms of a nursery for fish, feeding and (is a) loafing spot for waterfowl and other water dependent birds," Hartz said. "Dredging could adversely affect it for a period of time. Filling it in and eliminating it altogether is something I can safely say we would never permit to happen."

Anyone wanting to dredge, backfill or alter the area would need approval from Hartz and his counterparts at the Army Corps of Engineers. Such things fall under Michigan environmental protection statutes and the Federal Clean Water Act.

Caldwell said his plan also eliminates conditions under which accretion would likely reappear if dredged away without filling in the shoreline indentation to ease the flow of water downstream.

"If a new seawall were scalloped from Gaukler Pointe to the (Grosse Pointe) Yacht Club, water would just scoot around it rather than get stuck," Caldwell said.

The getting stuck part is being blamed on man-made structures such as Osius Park breakwall and yacht club that jut into the lake and interrupt littoral currents.

In general, as currents encounter obstructions, they slow and release suspended particles of sand and similar material. Over time a beach develops to snag whatever washes ashore, including decaying vegetation, which provides a foothold for plant life, more beach, more interrupted currents and so on.

The problem has gotten worse since lake levels dropped from their highs during the 1980s, transforming shallows into exposed bottomland.

Rankin Peck, Caldwell's neighbor, has lived in the 800 block of Lakeshore more than 60 years.

"We have a seawall that's been here 90 years," Peck said. "Now we have sand built up higher than the seawall. Sand has moved up from the bottom of the lake four or five feet over the last 50 years."

Patricia Verb has been living on the stretch of Lakeshore since 1993. She still can't find words to satisfactorily describe the odor of washed-up stuff and rotting vegetation emanating from shoreline muck at the foot of her back yard.

"I don't know," Verb said. "It's just awful. That's all I can say."

Caldwell, Peck and Verb acknowledge self interest in ridding accretion. Peck has a boathouse landlocked atop accretion. Caldwell and Verb are having hard times selling their houses.

"She had someone come out to buy her house," said Michael Bennane, Verb's attorney and former state representative from northwest Detroit. "He walked out to the breakwall and said there's no water here."

"Just muck," Verb said.

"It starts as that," Caldwell said. "It grows and grows and gets hard."

"Weed after weed," Verb said.

Caldwell et al may have found themselves living on the front line of environmental problems that could encroach into the pocketbooks of all Shores property owners. The same goes for residents of Grosse Pointe Farms where accretion is building north of manmade Pier Park, Crescent Sail Yacht Club and the former Dodge family landfill at the foot of Harbor Hill.

If accreted area is declared a wetland, even if caused by manmade action such as construction of a marina, the area comes under state and federal regulation regardless of zoning or ownership, according to Hartz.

Lakeside homeowners fear state intervention will result in a loss of control over their property, which will lead to a reduction in property values.

"I've been told by a real estate man that (33 homes) north of the yacht club are probably the most expensive homes in all of Grosse Pointe," Peck said. "(He) said real estate values could drop 50 percent."

Based on taxes Peck says he pays each year, a 50 percent loss in property values suffered equally by his 33 lakeside neighbors totals a \$1.32 million reduction in property taxes flowing to village hall.

The figure amounts to 30 percent of the Shores 2005 property tax revenues of \$4,372,199, and nearly 25 percent of total 2005 revenues, according to a recent routine audit. The forecast drop in property tax payments amounts to nearly two-thirds of the public safety budget, or twice the budget for public works.

"If that became a wetland," Caldwell told village trustees last week, "then we 33 owners would be in your offices for a reduction in our tax rate. If we didn't get a reduction, we'd be looking for litigation to get a reduction."

"I don't think you can afford to lose \$1 million per year, but we're heading for that," Peck said.

Wetlands are defined in the state Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act of 1994.

A wetland is "land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, wetland vegetation or aquatic life, and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp, or marsh."

Peck is among a handful of Shores residents last winter who applied for state permission to dredge 160,000 cubic yards of accretion spread over 96 acres of shoreline and bottomland.

Not all that area may qualify as wetland.

"The current application proposes to dredge an 80 acre box, within that box I would estimate only three to five acres is vegetated," Hartz said.

Peck, Caldwell, Verb and others want the village to help pay an estimated \$5 million to remove the accretion.

"If you don't do it, it's going to cost us all in the long run," Peck said. "It may cost \$5 million to remove, but you could lose \$1.25 million per year."

"Some people who don't live on the lake say, 'I don't care,'" Caldwell said. "But one should care. Because (taxes) they have to pay will go up if my property taxes go down."

In March the DEQ asked for clarification on Peck's application, adding, "The DEQ does not agree with the application that the proposed dredge will not impact any existing wetlands."

"It has never been the intention of the council that it should be a wetland," said Mark McInerney, Shores village attorney. "We'd rather not have that designation for some of the reasons Mr. Peck and Mr. Caldwell talked about."

Caldwell suggested forming a special in-house accretion committee.

"Let's get ahead of the attorneys and solve it," he said. "This community has the intellectual resources to come up with a solution. It is an ever-increasing problem that is solvable."

Michigan wetlands are not sacred ground

by Brad Lindberg

January 26, 2006

Melvin Purvis and his G-Men were untouchable. Wetlands aren't.

Wetland soil can be groomed, its grasses mowed and trees cut down. The whole mucky concoction of sand, dirt, decaying vegetation and critters can be dug up and hauled away.

All it takes is permission.

The revelation surprised people worried that sediment washing up on parts of the Grosse Pointe shoreline would be anointed hands-off status if wrapped within protection of a wetland designation.

It surprised John Booth.

Booth, a Grosse Pointe Shores lakeside landowner, expected government environmental regulators to deny his request to dredge 80 acres of accretion north of Vernier because the target area is or might become wetland.

"Once that happens, you're dead," Booth assumed.

"That's not true," said Andrew Hartz, of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality land and water management division. "I have been working for the DEQ approximately 11 years. We issued roughly 800 permits that impact wetlands from Northville to Gibraltar to Harrison Township."

The Wetland Protection Act requires a permit before wetlands can be altered.

"We issue probably 90 percent of wetland permits," Hartz said. "I caution everybody about getting caught up on the wetland issue."

Hartz spoke last week to nearly 200 people attending a forum on accretion. Sen. Martha Scott, D-Highland Park, organized the forum at the Grosse Pointe War Memorial.

Government environmental officials have authority to modify applications before issuing permits. Not every applicant gets what he or she wants.

"However, most wetland permits are issued in one form or another," Hartz said.

Aerial photographs of the shoreline north of Vernier show accretion has been developing for decades. Except for distant perspectives of the area from Shores Osius Park, the area of concern is out of public view behind houses on Lakeshore.

The matter has been achieving increased awareness in recent years due to highly visible accretion and tall weeds overtaking lakeside views above Pier Park at the foot of Moross in Grosse Pointe Farms.

"Accretion is a public nuisance," said Paul Koch, longtime Farms resident. "Under ordinances of Grosse Pointe Farms, it should be removed."

Koch remembers when views of Lake St. Clair were unobstructed from Lakeshore, the Pointes' signature avenue.

"There's no excuse for permitting this to continue," he said of the growing wall of weeds and invasive plants taken root near Pier Park.

Koch called for legislative action to change laws that might prevent reclaiming the shoreline.

"Whether state or federal law, they're manmade laws, and they can be changed," he said.

"The legislature has authority to change the definition of a wetland," said Rep. Edward Gaffney, R-Grosse Pointe Farms and former Farms mayor. "I don't know if that's the problem, from what the DEQ is saying."

Soil washed up on the shoreline isn't necessarily wetland.

Hartz defined wetland as "an area dominated by vegetation adapted to grow in moist soil conditions, saturated soil conditions during normal presence of water at or near the surface of the earth."

Wetlands host willow trees instead of oak trees and cattails instead of honeysuckles.

"There's a whole suit of plants that have adapted to grow in those saturated soil environments," Hartz said.

"I don't think it's a wetland," said Becky Booth, John's wife. "I think it's an emerging sand dune."

Hartz is familiar with the area the Booths want dredged above Osius Park. Hartz has been dealing with the area since late 1999, when Grosse Pointe Yacht Club officials needed a permit if they wanted to expand their marina.

"Actually, the potential wetland area constitutes five acres out of an 80-acre box that's requested to be altered," Hartz said.

Either way, the whole area sits below the ordinary high water mark of Lake St. Clair. It is therefore state property, or bottom land, held in trust by the DEQ. The area is subject to state regulations for the enjoyment of everybody who uses that section of lake.

"Whether it is wetland or Lake St. Clair bottom land, a permit is still required to alter that area," Hartz said.

There's also a federal component.

"Lake St. Clair is an international body of water," said Ken Debossart, director of the Office of the Great Lakes and former state senator representing St. Clair Shores. "We also operate under federal guidelines of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The federal level has to be addressed."

The Booths, fellow dredging advocates and many other people say the Pointes' accretion problem is manmade. They cite visible evidence of accretion wedged against landfills and marinas blocking the path of shoreline currents. Such projections interrupt, slow or stop shoreline currents (called littoral currents) which deposit sediment rather than carrying it downstream.

"If we want the lake to be natural, we need to return the littoral currents so we can have a natural shoreline once again," said Becky Booth.

Debate extends to what is and isn't a natural shoreline.

"Manmade structures stopped the water; so how can accretion be natural?" said Rankin Peck, another Shores lakeside homeowner.

"That's nature's reaction to man's manipulation of the lake," Hartz said. "It's not an easy problem. There's not an easy solution."

Digging up money for dredging north of Vernier

by Brad Lindberg

February 16, 2006

Some lakeside homeowners will dig deep to dredge their shoreline of washed-up soil and vegetation.

The offer comes from advocates of an estimated \$5 million reclamation project behind residential property on Lakeshore north of Vernier in Grosse Pointe Shores.

"I've talked to a few people who say they would be willing to pay their fair share," said Rankin Peck, one of 33 homeowners in the affected area.

\$5 million dollars divided equally among the properties comes to more than \$151,000 each.

"I'm sure we won't get every single person from 33 homes to pay a huge amount of money," Peck said. "But I'm sure that a majority would pay as long as somebody else helped."

"Somebody" includes the village, meaning taxpayers.

Goals include restoring a section of Lake St. Clair shoreline to 1960s conditions when modifications to Shores municipal marina included closing tunnels that carried shoreline currents and sediment downstream.

Peck said financial fallout from accretion — or sediment deposited along the shoreline — threatens all Shores residents. He and other Lakeshore residents claim accretion already has hurt property values. A decline in taxable value could result in \$1 million less tax revenue and reduced municipal services, Peck believes.

"The Shores can't afford to lose \$1 million per year in property taxes," he said.

Some Lakeshore residents already have paid more than their share to address the issue.

Becky Booth said she and her husband, John, have spent nearly \$250,000 since the late 1990s examining how man-made projections, such as Osius Park marina, affect the flow of sediment downstream.

"We've had these studies published and shared them with everyone," said Becky Booth. "It's a contribution to the community. It's time for other folks to step up."

Peck, the Booths and a few other residents are requesting state and federal permission to dredge about 160,000 cubic yards of sand, soil and vegetation from a concave section of shoreline behind their homes. The area comprises about 80 acres above the Shores municipal park toward Gaukler Point, site of the Edsel & Eleanor Ford Estate.

"We heard through the grapevine that one of the neighbors has said if everybody would participate and the city would get involved, they would consider contributions," Becky Booth said. "Everybody should make a significant contribution."

Because modifications to the municipal marina are being cited as contributing to accretion upstream, dredging advocates suggest reclamation should be paid by the village's insurance carrier.

"If a tree in your front yard is blown over and crushes your neighbor's car, your tree has caused damage to somebody else," said Joann Fitzgerald Ross, attorney working with the Booths and others. "Doesn't your insurance cover damage caused by your tree to your neighbor?"

"Village insurance covers things that happened during the term of the insurance," said Mark McInerney, village attorney. "But the harbor wall was built in the early 1960s with full approval of the state of Michigan. The harbor wall is getting old, but there's been no losses that would be covered by insurance."

During a forum on shoreline issues sponsored last month by Sen. Martha Scott, D-Highland Park, she promised to press for aid but made it clear there wasn't state money available for dredging.

Ever ready accretion keeps on growing

by Brad Lindberg

November 17, 2005

Chalky whitecaps break without sound over sandbars far offshore behind Kay Felt's lakeside home.

It's warm for mid-November, warm enough for Felt to remove her shoes, sit in the sun on her backyard patio and take in the view.

Her 14-year-old golden retriever, Nicky, rescued years ago from abandonment and proof that cats aren't the only animals to land on their feet, is a few feet away rolling on her back in the grass, squirming back and forth like a sidewinder. Paws going everywhere at once.

It's an iconic scene of style of life in mutli-million dollar houses that wouldn't exist without the area's most important natural asset, Lake St. Clair.

"What else do we have in Grosse Pointe to rival the northern Oakland County lakes? We have the panorama of the lake," said Felt, an attorney with a firm in downtown Detroit. "We don't have great shopping. We don't have great entertainment."

She motioned with her right hand past Nicky's flailing paws and windswept puffs of shedding fur to Lake St. Clair beyond.

"This is what we have," Felt said.

These days Felt and her neighbors have more than they bargained for.

Property north of Vernier to the 900 block of Lakeshore is being set upon by a creeping mass of silt (accretion) piling upon the shoreline at a regular rate.

In places where the sediment has been accumulating for years, it has solidified into firm ground dotted by low spots filled with stagnant water. In newer spots, it's just a mucky combination of mud and decaying vegetation. Throughout the area grow small trees and tall weeds, including invasive purple looestrife.

"(Accretion) grows northward by about 100 feet per year," Felt said.

It also grows outward into the lake. Those waves breaking out of earshot hundreds of yards offshore used to pound against Felt's steel breakwall.

Beneath the bottom rung of her breakwall ladder is a thick, black, stagnant goop crusted with grass and leaves.

During summer months, accretion generates a stench that, during onshore breezes, forces Felt indoors with windows shut.

"It's an overwhelming combination of rotten vegetables — if you've ever had a compost and opened it — and dead fish," she said.

Over the top edge of the breakwall there's the sound of an unseen animal wrestling through the scrub.

"A rat, probably," Felt said.

She and many of her neighbors blame accretion in the area on expansion of Shores Osius Park and the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club. Construction at the facilities involved closing shoreline tunnels which used to let lakeside currents carry suspended particles of dirt downstream. Now currents get backed up and deposit sediment.

Felt and others point to a 1990 study commissioned by the Shores that comes to the same conclusion.

As Shores officials consider plans to update their municipal harbor at Osius Park, Felt wants to make sure renovation includes an emphasis on replacing the former flow-throughs.

"In addition to cutting off the flow-throughs, they also put sheet metal piling on the north wall that deflects (waves) back,"

Felt said. "They need to reopen some major flow-throughs. Then they need to reconfigure that north wall."

She said deflected waves bounce back at an angle that adds to sediment deposits along the shoreline and buildup of sandbars offshore.

"If they made it a rock or rubble wall, depending on how they positioned it, waves would go out instead of up," Felt said.

Although the problem is piling up against her property, she said the issue has economic consequences for inland Shores property owners.

"It affects everyone's property values eventually," she said. "If these (lakeside) houses don't hold their value, then what is there across the way?"

Felt's accretion is hidden from public view. A visible version exists above Pier Park at the foot of Moross in Grosse Pointe Farms.

"I'm shocked at how quickly it's been moving in the Farms," Felt said. "That was caused by something very similar — they enlarged their parking lot and cut off their flow-through. See how quickly that is growing? That's going to grow all the way to the yacht club if it's not stopped."

No money dug up for dredging in the Shores

by Brad Lindberg

November 24, 2005

Despite hopes of state or federal aid to help dredge accretion from a section of the Grosse Pointe Shores shoreline, no funding sources have been found.

Some Shores residents are seeking grants in case they win approval from government regulators to allow lakeside dredging.

Residents hope for financial help to remove approximately 160,000 cubic yards of silt and sand deposited or washed ashore north of Vernier.

In many areas the deposits are an unwalkable, smelly muck. In others the ground has solidified enough to support entire tracts of unwanted vegetation gone wild.

Shores officials estimate dredging the 80-acre area would cost \$7 million.

"It would help me evaluate this proposal if I knew where that \$7 million was to come from," Shores President Dr. James Cooper wrote to one of the dredging applicants last march. "If the proposal is approved by the government, do you and the other applicants plan to ask the village to pay some or all of these costs, or ask a court to order the village to do so?"

The Pointes' state representative and senator agreed months ago to research the matter but haven't come up with anything.

Now a university scientist for whom government grants are essential to fund studies of Lake St. Clair and the Great Lakes has come up empty handed on behalf of Shores officials.

Dr. Guy Meadows, director of University of Michigan hydrodynamics laboratories within the department of naval architecture and marine engineering, was asked recently if any of his sources knew of money available for dredging.

"I asked Guy, who I know as a friend, if he could contact the (Michigan) Department of Environmental Quality and (U.S. Army) Corps of Engineers to see if there's any funds available," said Mike Kenyon, Shores village manager.

"I made several phone calls to determine the possibility of either state or federal assistance to local communities for dredging operations," Meadows said in his written response to Kenyon dated Oct. 31.

Meadows contacted decision makers in two units of the state Department of Environmental Quality. Both leads led nowhere.

Meadows said the head of the coastal zone management division "reported no such monies are available for dredging."

The head of the submerged lands management unit also reported "no state aid is available for dredging activities." Furthermore, Meadows was told that "dredging along the open coast as contemplated by the Grosse Pointe Shores (residents) is not a 'permissible' activity" and would be opposed by state regulators.

Things didn't get better on the federal level.

"Under the Water Resources Act, some recreational boating harbor dredging had been funded through the Corps of Engineers," Meadows said. "This funding has been limited to small levels of support, was within existing harbors and required Congressional appropriation. This finding was also targeted at the elimination of high levels of contaminated sediments from harbor sites."

Accretion has been building up north of Vernier for decades.

Some residents blame the problem on landfills used to construct Shores Osius Park and the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club. Landfills projecting into the lake interrupt currents that used to carry sediment downstream, according to the residents.

Shores officials and others have a counter argument. They cite a lack of accretion along the park shoreline and breakwall. Rather, they look upstream of the park to Hawthorne Point and where a lakeside homeowner dumped landfill in the lake.

The area being debated is generally out of public view behind private homes.

The public can see a similar but smaller area of accretion north of Farms Pier Park at Moross and Lakeshore.

Kay Felt, a Lakeshore homeowner and one of the Shores residents seeking a dredging permit, said accretion – and its attendant odor of rotting vegetation and unsightliness – is threatening her property values.

"If we do not have the panorama of the lake, what will convince people to move to the Grosse Pointe area or to stay here," Felt said. "There are too many other lovely communities with great schools, good shopping, wonderful dining and entertainment. Doing nothing causes one more property to be overcome by this devastation with every passing year."

Hugo Higbie, a Grosse Pointe Farms resident with more than 50 years working in the local real estate business, said concerns about maintaining lakeside property values should be shared by inland homeowners.

"The lake is our most important asset to affect property values," Higbie told Shores trustees last week. "If we start seeing property values erode along the lake, be it in the Shores or Farms, we are in deep trouble. It is going to affect your whole tax base. I can't tell you how concerned I am."

In 2001 Meadows secured grants to design and locate a data collection buoy in the northwest section of Lake St. Clair. The buoy was designed to detect E.coli bacteria, record weather conditions and track wind, waves and currents.

Later, Meadows was unable to obtain funding for an expanded network of buoys and radar systems to measure and chart surface currents. One of the proposed radar sites was atop the Grosse Pointe War Memorial.

Meadows hoped to collect and correlate data for creation of a computer model to track everything from pollution spills and sewage discharges. Coast Guard officials were interested in using Meadows' model to predict where currents would most likely carry overboard boaters needing rescue.

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2005-06-30 » Opinion »

How to fix accretion in the Shores

06/30/2005 - You can't fight Mother Nature. That is what lakeside property owners north of the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club know for a fact.

Since about the 1960s, accretion — the build up of sand along breakwalls — has been a mounting problem for property owners along the lake.

As evidenced by a photograph in last week's Grosse Pointe News of Rankin Peck's property and his boathouse that now has become a beach house due to accretion, the problem is severe, and it stinks — literally.

What used to be gently lapping water at the breakwall is now accumulated sand and rotting vegetation and debris.

What used to be gently sloping mowed lawn down to water's edge is now eclipsed by weedy, reedy, marginal flora.

The problem is extensive. Property owners in the affected area who have been studying the matter, estimate the accretion at some 160,000 cubic yards covering 80 acres. The cost of the dredging is ballparked at \$7 million.

The question is who will pay for it?

Obviously, since the former lake bottom outside the breakwall is considered state land, individual property owners do not want to foot the bill to maintain state real estate.

The Village of Grosse Pointe Shores likewise sees little benefit in helping the state.

And, as we all know, the state is struggling to make ends meet as it is. We doubt the governor and Legislature would be willing to spend money they do not have for the benefit of 31 lakeside property owners.

Then there is another problem. Once the accretion is dredged, there is nothing to stop it from coming back. So is dredging money well spent?

Property owners petitioning for the dredging say the accretion is due to decisions made long ago in building the Shores and yacht club marinas. The harbors, petitioners say, prevent the free flow of water and particulates along the coast.

As obstructions, the harbors cause the sand to settle and accumulate.

If they are correct, then dredging is only a temporary fix. The causes of the problem remain.

We have an idea that may meet everyone's needs.

Why not just deed the accreted property over to the affected property owners?

They would gain title to more land in exchange for paying for new breakwalls, hauling in topsoil and dredging if necessary to even out the new shoreline.

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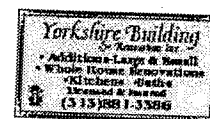
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Further, the new breakwall could curve outward toward the tip of the harbor obstruction and provide for a better current flow.

Some might object, thinking residents are getting "free" public land for their own. But they fail to take into account the cost of rehabilitating the land.

They further forget the additional taxes the benefiting property owners will have to pay on the additional land. Additional local, county, state and school taxes would be generated for perpetuity.

As it stands now, the accreted area is a no-man's wasteland with little value to anyone. It is an eyesore and a stench.

Perhaps our idea is too simplistic, but whoever said simple was bad?



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Lakefront property owners can get vegetation relief

by Bonnie Caprara

June 26, 2003

Some Grosse Pointe Shores residents may be able to get some relief from overgrown vegetation along the accreted shoreline.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm recently enacted legislation passed in the House and Senate that will allow the removal of some vegetation of exposed lake bottomlands in Grand Traverse Bay and Saginaw Bay. The law protects endangered species and is limited to the removal of vegetation of 50 percent or 100 feet of the riparian property, whichever is greater.

The legislation also allows for property owners in other areas to apply for a beach maintenance permit from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for a reduced fee of \$50. Maintenance is limited to small scale pulling of vegetation by hand, leveling of sand in non-vegetated areas, mowing of vegetation, grooming of beaches, and construction of a path from the upland directly to the water's edge.

Rep. Edward Gaffney, R-Grosse Pointe Farms, said he initially voted against the bill the first time it appeared in the House but voted on the final version.

"It's a reasonable bill," Gaffney said. "They can't exceed 50 percent of the property, and they can't go out there and wreak havoc."

Neither Gaffney nor Village Superintendent Michael Kenyon were aware of any residents who have applied for a beach maintenance permit. About 30 properties in the Shores are affected by the rising lake bottom along the coast of Lake St. Clair, some which extend over 200 feet from seawalls.

The new legislation hasn't changed the course of action being taken by five Lakeshore residents who are seeking a dredging permit from the DEQ and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to remove accretion from in front of their houses.

"The legislation is so new, no one knows what it means," said John Booth, one of the property owners who has requested the permit.

The DEQ and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are still reviewing the dredging permit request. They have asked Booth and the four other property owners for additional information and have not yet scheduled a public hearing for the request.

Shoreline residents seek accretion removal permit

by Bonnie Caprara

April 10, 2003

A group of Grosse Pointe Shores residents are seeking to recreate the pristine shoreline upon which their houses overlooked.

Five homeowners along Lakeshore have filed a joint permit application with the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to have about 125,000 cubic yards of accretion removed from the shoreline from the north border of Osius Park to the 1000 block of Lakeshore. Eight other homeowners have signed letters of consent to have accretion removed from in front of their houses.

The accretion extends about 600 meters, affecting about 30 lakefront properties.

"The more neighbors we talk to, the more stories we hear about severe problems caused by the accretion," said John Booth, one of the homeowners who filed the permit application. "One resident told me there's an accumulation of seaweed, muck, and all kinds of stuff on his property. On a warm, breezy day, there's a horrible smell Ñ to the point that he and his wife get headaches when they sit on their porch."

Once the DEQ has reviewed the application for completeness, it will forward the request to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with which it will post a joint public notice. The two agencies will then conduct site visits, evaluations and hold public hearings. The application process is expected to take from three to six months.

Booth said he was not sure who would pay for the dredging, if approved.

According to Tom Graf, an environmental quality specialist with the DEQ, the accretion build-up is a result of the design of the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club and landfill added to Osius Park and a neighboring resident in the early 1960s. Accretion build-up has grown rapidly since the late 1970s.

"Essentially, the wave action, which moves from north to south, is always moving sand and materials along the shoreline," Graf said. "When that drift meets a perpendicular extension along the lake Ñ such as the Yacht Club, park and its neighbor Ñ it drops the material. The waves can't push the material any further and it builds up over time."

Graf also said that low water levels have added to the problem.

"We need to review that very carefully when we do our evaluation," Graf said. "Water levels are cyclical. The water will be back up."

Graf said that resident objections would also be taken into consideration in the DEQ and Corps of Engineer's evaluation.

Not all Lakeshore residents are in favor of dredging.

"I think it's a legitimate issue that needs to be addressed, but I don't think it's proper for it to be addressed by a group of self-serving individuals," said Lakeshore resident Jack Caldwell. "It's a governmental issue that involves every member of this community."

Caldwell added that he would not endorse any plans until he knew who would be paying for any proposed dredging.

Village Superintendent Michael Kenyon said the village would likely appear at a DEQ/Corps of Engineers hearing as a concerned party.

This is the second attempt for Booth and another filer, Ralph Wilson, to have the accretion removed from in front of their lakeshore properties. The two filed suit along with several others through a group called NYCE Ñ Neighbors Concerned About Yacht Club Expansion in 1999 Ñ against the village and the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club. NYCE blamed the construction of the village and club's shared harbor for the accretion in front of their properties.

Third Circuit Judge Isidore Torres dismissed the case without prejudice in September 2001, saying the dispute should be resolved by the DEQ and the Corps of Engineers.

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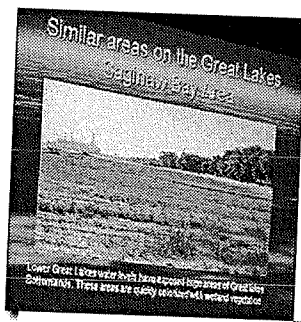


Andrew Hartz of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality discusses accretion to members of the Grosse Pointe Shores Garden Club. Grosse Pointe is not alone. Below is a slide of an overgrown accreted area in the Saginaw Bay, left, and a comparable slide of Lake St. Clair along Grosse Pointe Shores. Photos by Brad Lindberg

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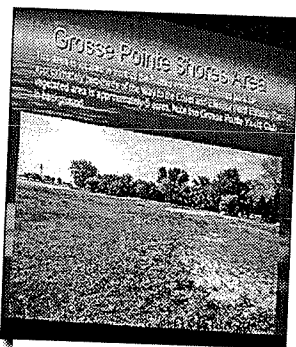
04/13/2006 - State permission to tinker with wetlands depends on the technique and extent of work to be performed.

"If you're going in with a piece of equipment to scrape the soil down and remove all plants in a wetland or in the area below the high water mark of the lake, that requires a permit," said Andrew Hartz, district supervisor of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Land and Water Management Division. "If you're going in with hand tools, that is something we don't normally require a permit for."



Hartz, of the City of Grosse Pointe, is among state and federal officials who will rule on permits to alter the build-up of sediment along the Pointe shoreline, namely near the foot of Moross in the Farms and above Vernier in the Shores.

"The Farms has been contacted by some people who live directly adjacent to the area who want something done," Hartz said. "Some cutting has been done down there."



Farms officials have met with Hartz about obtaining a permit to control non-native vegetation, including aggressive phragmites, thriving in the accretion zone stacked against the upstream breakwall of Pier Park.

"It would be nice to have long term stewardship of the area," Hartz said. "They have a plan to get some of those invasive out, replant the area and control the invasive. I see a lot of opportunity."



Phragmites australis can grow to heights of 15 to 20 feet. Photo by Maryland Department of Agriculture

He envisioned the establishment of an attractive community of native plants.

"But I caution people from going down there and mowing it down," Hartz said.

A similar but larger condition exists above Osius Park near Vernier in Grosse Pointe Shores.

"What you see is a combination of accumulated material as well as lower Great Lakes water levels," Hartz said. "From 1986 to 1997, we had a long period of very high water that people came to think of as normal. What we're seeing today is the long term average being what I would call normal. What was so dramatic was that after 1997, water levels dropped quickly. People were alarmed."

Of about 80 acres of accretion in the Shores extending hundreds of feet into the lake, only five acres is wetland, he said.

"At higher elevations its very sandy," Hartz said. "It drops down a little into a dry meadow, then a wet meadow into emerging wetland and marsh."

Most of the accretion zones lie below the lake's normal high water mark. Such land is owned by the state but isn't off limits to minor grooming by adjacent property owners.

"You can mow 40 percent of your frontage to a height of two inches and create a pathway no greater than six feet wide," Hartz said. "Almost the entire area is below the ordinary high water mark of Lake St. Clair. We don't require permits for work above the high water mark. Below the high water mark, a permit is needed. The state owns that property. While landowners have exclusive access to the dry parts of it, they cannot alter it because it's state-owned bottom land."

Hartz's job puts him in the sights of various stakeholders, many having a different perspective of the same issue.

In the Shores, many lakeside residents want the accretion removed, saying it is ruining their shoreside views and reducing the value of multi-million dollar properties.

"People like myself with the state are charged with balancing the rights of landowners, the integrity of the natural resource (and) the interests of the public that has the right to traverse the waters of the lake unencumbered," he said. "But then you

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have landowners who have expectations of their waterfront. I don't blame them for having those expectations. Everyone has paid a lot of money for those homes and pays a lot of taxes for those properties. My hope is people can work together on a solution everybody can live with."

Hartz made his comments during a meeting of the Grosse Pointe Shores Garden Club.

Lynn Kiley, club member, sees the build-up of sediment as an opportunity to beautify the shoreline.

"The accretion area could be changed into something of benefit to the community," Kiley said. "It could be beautiful with the proper introduction of proper species and proper management. With proper management it could really become an asset to the community."

Brad Lindberg is a staff writer for the Grosse Pointe News, covering the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms and Grosse Pointe Shores.

